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Trajectories of experience of real life events. A semiotic approach to the dynamics of positioning.

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to the study of experience as a semiotic process of constructing the personal meaning of the situation lived. Its main purpose is to devise a semiotic methodology capable of describing and explaining the dynamics of positioning when facing personal lived experiences in real life contexts. Twenty four young adults were exposed to a simulated conflict and then asked to write a narrative of their understanding of the incident and a self-report of their personal experiences. Results show how narratives and trajectories of experience present different forms in each participant, which could be related to: a) the understanding of the situation lived and the position taken regarding the conflict; and b) the position each participant takes regarding the reports they had to produce for the researchers. The incorporation of reflexivity into the applied method allows and identification of how the dynamics of double positioning leave traces in the records produced.

Keywords: Experience, trajectories of experience, positioning, semiotics.

Trajectories of experience of real life events.

A semiotic approach to the dynamics of positioning.

Abstract

This paper is devoted to the study of experience as a semiotic process of constructing the personal meaning of the situation lived. Its main purpose is to devise a semiotic methodology capable of describing and explaining the dynamics of positioning when facing personal lived experiences in real life contexts. Twenty four young adults were exposed to a simulated conflict and then asked to write a narrative of their understanding of the incident and a self-report of their personal experiences. Results show how narratives and trajectories of experience present different forms in each participant, which could be related to: a) the understanding of the situation lived and the position taken regarding the conflict; and b) the position each participant takes regarding the reports they had to produce for the researchers. The incorporation of reflexivity into the applied method allows an identification of how the dynamics of double positioning leave traces in the records produced.

Experience: a dynamic and semiotic process.

How is a lived situation understood? How is it that in the same situation some people feel impelled to act and some others do not? What makes some people to act and others to refrain from doing so? Why do people, who an observer would say behaved similarly in the same situation, could feel very differently about the way they themselves behaved? These are questions about personal experience, about the forms it takes in different people, about how subjective experience relates to behavior and to moral judgment of one's own performance in a particular setting. Surely, there is interpersonal variability in forms of experiencing, and if this variability is not random, some explanation should be offered to account for the differences observed.

This paper aims to explore some answers to these questions. This will be done, not by looking into what individual traits may lead participants to feel and act differently, but by describing how experiences change as the situation develops, and searching for what may explain those changes. In other words, we are interested in describing and explaining the development of varieties of experience in real life settings.

We will examine experience not only as a set of phenomena arising in consciousness, but as a semiotic process of constructing meaning and position taking regarding the situations lived. Our purpose is to develop a

semiotic model for the description of personal lived experiences in context, which may be able to accommodate the varieties observed within a formal structure capable of accounting for their unfolding. In sum, this paper aims to develop a semiotic model of constructing experience, together with a method for its study.

An exploratory and descriptive empirical study was devised for this purpose. An incident, involving abuse of property and xenophobic comments, was simulated by a group of actors within a university classroom so that unaware students felt appealed to take some personal moral position towards what they believed to be a real life scene. The purpose was not only to observe how they reacted, but also to collect retrospective reports of the unfolding of their experiences as the situation developed.

What is meant by the term experience?

Experience is a venerable term with a long history of uses in philosophy and psychology. This gives it wide meanings that bring together quite different senses. All of them refer to the polarity objectivity-subjectivity, to how the outer and inner worlds relate to each other both in consciousness and behavior. Experience simultaneously addresses mental phenomena in consciousness and to what these phenomena refer to - the world and myself. However, each sense emphasizes a particular aspect of such polarity.

It is interesting to note that many of these senses are shared in European languages (for English and Spanish, see Merrian-Webster on-line Dictionary; Diccionario de la Real Academia Española 2001). Let us review them. Firstly, it has a cognitive sense, “the act or process of directly perceiving events or reality”; second, a “practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity”, i.e., a personal quality acquired throughout time (e.g., “has 10 years' experience in the job”); third, “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through”, “the conscious events that make up an individual life” (Merrian-Webster on-line Dictionary). It is in this third sense where the two languages start to differ. Although the Spanish term *experiencia* (like English and French *experience*, and German *Erfahrung*) gathers these three senses, the latter is better expressed through another word: *vivencia*; a term that, according to Ferrater (1981) was coined by José Ortega y Gasset as a translation of the German word *Erlebnis* as used by Dilthey. When *vivencia* (*Erlebnis*) is distinguished from *experiencia* (experience, *Erfahrung*), it is because the first emphasizes the sense of a lived immediate subjective quality that involves the self, while the second takes a more detached approach towards what is experienced. In other terms, *vivencia* (*Erlebnis*) is about personal sense; it is to be understood, and so it belongs to the realm of hermeneutics. In contrast, *experiencia* (experience,

Erfahrung) tends to be taken as leaning towards the objective pole, the cognition of the experienced object. Jorge Semprún¹ (1995, p. 188) offers an interesting discussion on how the ability to distinguish *vivencia* from experience² may affect one's way of making sense of lived events.

There is another sense of experience worth highlighting: experience as what appears in consciousness before any judgment, as a sort of the pre-predicative apprehension of some otherness. Part of the work of the early psychology of consciousness was an attempt to identify how the most elemental conscious phenomena could be provoked through stimulation in laboratory settings (e.g., Wundt 1873-74) so that a sort of catalogue could be elaborated (e.g., Titchener 1910). The idea of such elemental kind of phenomena is still alive in philosophy of mind under the name of *qualia* (e.g., Dennet 1991). This kind of experience will not be touched upon in this paper.

So viewed, experience (*Ehrfarung*) is related to sensation (and also to feelings) and is susceptible to experimental study by controlling stimulation. In contrast, *vivencias* (*Erlebnis*) are related to sense and meaning-making, and their study requires a different strategy.

Experiences are fleeting, transient entities. They happen only once, but this does not make them unique. Everybody is perfectly capable of organizing them into classes, and identifying them as belonging to a specific one (color, pitch, pleasure, fear, doubt, determination, etc.), as well as recognizing their re-instantiation. The lexicon of the folk-psychology inscribed in the natural language of all cultural groups, even if diverse, offers plenty of categories for the classification of experiences. What is unique is the synthetic personal experience lived in each particular situation (*vivencia*).

Experience is then a sort of umbrella concept that combines affection, cognition and behavior: the three basic psychological functions; as well as meaning-making and the sense of self. When Psychological inquiry focuses on the study of experience, these aspects cannot be left aside, nor can the synchronic and diachronic dimensions which interact in shaping them be dispensed.

¹ Jorge Semprún (1923-2011) was a Spanish-French bilingual intellectual and novelist (as well as citizen of both countries) who as an adolescent exiled with his family to France during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). When studying in the Sorbonne he joined the French Résistance against the Nazi occupation. He was arrested and incarcerated together with other French political prisoners in Buchenwald for several years until liberation. There he became acquainted with Maurice Halwachs until his death in the camp. Semprún was Spanish Minister of Culture (1988-1991) when Felipe González was the Premier.

² French and English are similar in their use of the term *experience*. See also Jodelet (2006).

Synthetic lived experiences

Lived experiences (*vivencias*) have a synthetic character. All the phenomena arising in consciousness in a particular moment are unified into a meaningful whole, so that one simultaneously experiences the world, one self, how one feels about both, and often some urge for acting or withdrawing. This could not be the case if one did not have some previous beliefs about how things are and work, including oneself. These beliefs are acquired through experiences lived or reported by others. Whatever the case, beliefs are supported by messages made of symbols (images, words and utterances) with a formal structure, which are capable of adding the flesh of meaning and sense to the bones of the conscious³ phenomena felt in a particular instant, and so provide continuity to events, and sense and stability (identity) to what one takes to be the reality of the world and oneself. Without the accumulation of experience through learning and the mediation of stories, causal explanations and other forms of socio-cultural knowledge accumulated throughout time, no meaning could be attributed to phenomena, nor could any kind of identity and sense be conceived.

This is the kind of synthetic experience that interests us here. It is the personal experience of real life situations, in which not only the content of consciousness (the sparking of transient phenomena and *qualia*), but also the processes that provide them with meaning by their insertion into a stream of consciousness with a personal sense – what leads one to recognize the experience one is living as one's own. It is the kind of experience that even if felt as immediately present, also brings with it a sense of time that calls for a past and a future, not just as a measure of time, but as strings threading the sense of one's own life.

Synthetic experiences have a teleological character; they drive us to a future that provides them with sense. These synthetic experiences are what make us aware of ourselves and the world. If we accept that synthetic experiences gather together different contents into a structured unified organic functional whole, we are also accepting that this synthesis cannot be but an outcome of developmental processes (see Rosa, in press).

Synthetic experiences bring together universality and particularity. On the one hand, they are made of psychological processes that may keep some of the regularities of their own working, even if they adapt their functioning to the new organic totality in which they are immersed. On the other hand, any synthetic experience is no doubt unique, but such uniqueness is not to be equated to exceptionality. When studying synthetic experiences one may expect each particular personal experience to be unique, but also that the experiences lived

³ Experience is neither to be equated with consciousness, nor can be explained by only referring to conscious phenomena (for a discussion, see Rosa, in press).

1 by different individuals of a similar background when living the same situation share many of their structural
2 properties.
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4 This makes it possible to repeat observations and produce reliable records, so that what is common, and
5 what varies and in what circumstances, can be highlighted. Such strategy opens the path to the possibility of
6 description of different ways of structuring synthetic experiences, as well as for exploring theories about their
7 development.
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10 *Making sense of what one is living through* 11 12

13 When we are involved in a situation, we try to understand what is happening, what kind of situation we
14 are facing and what we have to do. When the situation is very familiar and resembles earlier experiences we can
15 do this quite automatically, through the activation of an intentional schema (Rosa, 2007a) that starts a
16 dramaturgical actuation (a sort of learned script attuned to the current circumstances, see Rosa, 2007a).
17 However, when the situation is unfamiliar or cannot be easily identified, the process is not so smooth. In such
18 cases, alternative interpretations compete and so the flow of the performance breaks, and attention focuses on
19 figuring out what kind of situation one is facing. When confusion persists, deliberative thinking based on a
20 dialogical communication with others or with oneself (Vygotski 1934; Wertsch 1991) using rhetorically shaped
21 arguments (Billig 1987), is put into use. The result is an interpretation of the situation that is visible in one's
22 behavior, even if one is not convinced about being right. When conscious deliberation leads to action, rather than
23 playing the cultural script prescribed for the role taken, as an actor/actress does, one takes on the role of director,
24 telling oneself what to do in the situation, even if doubts may persist. It may even be the case that a performance
25 has to be improvised anew. When this is the case, one becomes an author and actress/actor in one. In such cases
26 we say we have made a deliberate choice.
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46 When a situation becomes more complex and a scene follows another we may just respond to each
47 immediate situation. But if something breaks the flow of events one expects, one needs to gather an
48 understanding of what was going on before and is happening now in order to try to direct one's current action.
49 This requires compiling happenings into a story, in which previous acting (our own and others') appear as events
50 within a narrative leading up to the present situation. Once this is done, the language of theatre is transformed
51 into the language of the novel, the latter being a metalanguage of the former (Bakhtin 1994).
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59 Thus, when we are involved in a situation in which we cannot but participate, we are forced to generate
60 narratives of what is happening. These are confirmed, rejected or reformulated as the situation rolls out. When
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1 the situation ends, we close the narrative, but only temporarily, as any subsequent event may change the meaning
2 of what happened and so change the narrative produced. The change never stops, as later events can again affect
3 the interpretation and presentation of the past in order to make sense of the present we are talking from.
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6 Deliberation (both affective and cognitive) takes one to decide between the values around which the
7 sense of the self is built, and so what aspects of one's identity shall become more salient in subjective
8 experience. A consequence is that one's actuations and self, become objects for appraisal, so that the arising
9 feelings turn into resources for monitoring one's actuations (Blasi 2005).
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15 *A semiotic approach to the study of lived experience.*
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18 The description just presented resorted to psychological processes of diverse kinds with little reference to how
19 conscious experience could be linked to those processes. To attempt to relate experience with behavior a
20 theoretical model tailored to these purposes would be needed. This is what Rosa (2007a; 2007b) did by applying
21 Peirce's semiotics to the analysis of action and construction of psychological phenomena. Feelings, motives,
22 thoughts, decisions and voluntary action develop from the operation of intentional schemas, starting from
23 elementary signs arising in consciousness such as affect and arousal (Russell 2003). These processes are
24 constructed through couplings of the agent with the environment, and become susceptible to be shaped by
25 sociocultural symbols and practices so that eventually events get formed and linked into narratives, making
26 voluntary behavior possible. This allows experiences to be communicated and thus opens the path for the study
27 of the trajectories synthetic experiencing may take in a particular setting. The concept of *dramaturgical*
28 *actuation* (Rosa 2007b), as a synthesis of action and semiosis, is a device to account for how experience
29 develops into psychological processes leading to understanding lived events and governing behavior.
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44 This approach makes it possible for experiences to be conceived of as a series of interpretation of signs,
45 which refer to both elements of the environment and one's own subjectivity, and leads to a series of steps. These
46 allow, first, to construct a simultaneous understanding of the situation and oneself before the situation; and then,
47 to ponder what to do so that a path of action can be chosen, and eventually to have feelings and to produce
48 judgments about what one did within the situation.
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54 Such a view takes understanding to be the result of series of semiotic operations constituting the
55 situation, the actors, one's self and their actuations (including one's own), as semiotised objects. Those objects,
56 in turn, as they are represented (Rosa and Pievi, 2013), affect the agent and so new feelings and judgments arise
57 that give the unfolding scene its significance. As we view it, this semiotic process is not only sequential, but also
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synthetic, since it is able to produce increasingly complex objects as the situation evolves, which in each step compile the significance of previously constructed phenomena into a unified understanding.

In other words, sets of recursive semiosis produce *synthetic experiences (vivencias)*, which bring together an understanding of the situation and of oneself in the situation into a meaningful whole. In addition, such a view presents *living experiences (vivencias)* as a developmental process unfolding throughout time. This temporal nature makes it conceivable to study the genesis of these kinds of experiences, the shape they may take in each step, and the trajectories of development they may follow, so that different trajectories of experiencing the same scene could be described and accounted for.

Self and positioning

The synthetic experience of a strip of life is not just an understanding of the unfolding of the perceived scene, but also of oneself within the situation, of what one should or should not do at that given time. One's own self, what one does, and the moral dimension of what one is living, are unavoidable parts of lived experience.

Harré (2012) takes this moral aspect of action to be indispensable for the explanation of human social action. His Positioning Theory approaches this task by looking at how rights and duties are assigned to the participating actors; something that he takes to be not independent of the kind of conventional story one tells in order to understand the unfolding episodes. Such story carries a particular moral order with it in which the characters have been assigned certain rights and responsibilities. If one takes on the position of one character in the story, it can be expected that one would be compelled to act accordingly to the beliefs one has about how such a character should behave within the moral order set by the story one understands to be immersed in – what Harré calls *position*.

These three aspects (story, position, and dramatic actuation) are the vertices of what Harré (2012) calls the 'positioning triangle'. These three elements determine each other, so that if one of them changes, so do the others. This, no doubt, is a process that does not always happen at once. It may take some time to figure out, and it may very well be that in the course of trying to figure out what is happening, the story one believes to be living had to be discarded and changed for another. If this happens, there is little doubt that what one feels should do, and what actually gets done, also change.

An empirical study of the constitution of experience

Understanding lived experiences is then a complex process spanning the time in which episodes of the unfolding scenes overlap with the agent's actuations addressed to make sense of what is happening. An attempt at grasping such a process required devising an empirical study which provided data about actual on-line performances, about how individuals understood the situation, about what feelings were felt, and what deliberations and moral judgments were carried out. In sum, observational data and participant's retrospective reports are needed.

Setting the scenery for the activity.

To this purpose we designed an open activity that could be considered real by participants, so they might feel called on to act. The activity was staged in a classroom on the first day of class of a senior course of Psychology at the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid. Three professional actors, pretending to be students, faked an incident involving moral, identity and civic issues. One of them, an Argentinean, took the mobile telephone of the absent lecturer and pretended to make a transcontinental call. An actress told him off for 'stealing', and a discussion started, which soon turned into ethnic and cultural issues. The choice of time and scene meant that participants could not easily spot the actors, as it is not uncommon to find students of many origins in such courses.

The three professional actors were: Cristian, a young Argentinean; Maria, a young Spaniard; and Pablo, another young Argentinean. The rest of the participants were 24 students⁴ (7 men and 17 women), of which two were Latin American (one Puerto Rican and one Argentinean) and two French. The remainder were Spaniards and some of them had been the lecturer's students in previous modules.

The activity took approximately 20 minutes. The whole situation was filmed by three video cameras. Two of them were hidden and were not spotted by participants and a third was intentionally visibly left on the table by the teacher, together with a cellular telephone and other objects (Figure 1 shows the spatial layout of participants in the classroom). As the incident unfolded, some students got suspicious about whether they were in some kind of simulation; three of them spotted the camera on the table and warned some of their friends. Other students took the situation to be genuine until its very end. This was something we expected. Whether the students took the situation to be real or not is rather irrelevant for our purpose. What we wanted to study was the way they made sense of the situation they lived.

⁴ There were 26 students in the room. Two of them exercised their right to withdrawing their data from analysis.

Once the incident was over and the instructor was back in the classroom, the participants were informed that the incident was a simulation and were asked for their written consent to use the records of their participation for publication. After that, and before they had time to discuss the activity among themselves, they were handed out a protocol in which they were asked: a) to describe what happened, and b) to complete an extensive self-report (open questionnaire) on what they were thinking, feeling and doing during the lived situation.

Fig. 1 Spatial layout of students, furniture and cameras in the classroom

Applying reflexivity: What really happened during the activity?

One may think that the events that happened in the course of the activity could be described objectively by an impartial observer. However, it has been argued that is impossible to describe or tell what happened without adopting a standpoint, without introducing a specific organization of time and meaning. In other words, it is impossible to avoid a discursive construction of lived experience (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates 2001; Bamberg, 2009). As Brescó (2008 and 2009) says, it is impossible to separate the events from how they are portrayed in discourse. This leads us to question the very existence of events as an entity pre-existing their constitution in discourse. Events cannot be outside a web of performances whose sense is to be found among other places in the agent's intention, or in the speaker's utterances. Whatever the case, it would be impossible to explain the procedure we followed without presenting the situation participants lived through. When doing so we are forced to present a provisional account of what happened during the activity.

Table 1 offers an account which aims to describe what happened in a summarized form. It is not an attempt to tell "what really happened" in detail. It is rather the researchers' interpretation which we offer to the readers so the argument presented in the paper can be understandable. We have to warn that this is an account produced in retrospect, as are those of the participants. We cannot claim to have more access to "what really happened" than them.

After watching the recordings several times and analyzing the transcripts, three researchers agreed to divide the activity into fifteen scenes according to the topic discussed (for more details see Rosa, González and Barbato 2009). This strategy allowed us to keep track of what parts of the activity appeared in the each participant's narrative, in addition to respecting the event structure present in each narrative.

Table 1 A summary of the development of the incident as observed from the video recordings of the session

1 What an observer can see when watching the videotapes is a number of performances in a scenery.
2 There are a number of people moving in space and talking to each other, regardless of their profession and how
3 spontaneous or artificial their performance may be. What the viewer of the tapes sees, or an observer in the
4 room could have witnessed, is very similar to a play. It is however a play with no pre-existing script. Even the
5 professional actors had only prepared the starting situation and then improvised. For the rest, a story had to be
6 constructed as time went on; it was an improvisation. This makes any story about what happened to be an *ex post*
7 *facto* production.
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10 Our goal is to carry out a descriptive analysis of the process of constitution of experience. The empirical
11 basis we will work on is the participants' written production, together with the transcription of their verbal
12 interventions. Data gathering was organized to facilitate the rendering of experiences. Thus, it started when we
13 asked participants to describe "what happened" in writing, followed by a set of questions about the processes of
14 constitution of the experiences lived.
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17 The intention behind this procedure was to induce participants first, to render a view of the activity they
18 had just experienced and, then, to provide a retrospective report about the process of constitution of their
19 experiences. Thus, the narratives produced acted as a stabilizing device for the understanding of the situation,
20 which had to be reflected upon immediately after in order to produce the written self-report. The latter, in
21 addition, may also add new information about the experiences lived. As the written account had to be produced
22 straight away and without any communication among participants, we can stipulate that what was produced
23 corresponds with the interpretation they were able to build at that moment in time.
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26 *Retrospection*

27 We cannot be naïve enough to believe that what a person says or writes upon request after the fact is an
28 accurate reproduction of the process lived when it was taking place. The written accounts provided us with the
29 result from the participants' communication with the researchers and with themselves. The degree to which they
30 are one or the other – or both – is one of the aspects we sought to find out. In that sense, this is a study of the
31 genesis of performances/experiences and how they are rationalized. However, the data collected through these
32 procedures, in spite of sharing a common situation as a referent, were collected at different times and belong to
33 different activity settings. Therefore, we cannot consider them simply as data about different aspects of the same
34 events, but as records of different performances gathered at different moments. The degree to which somebody's
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1 online performance is coherent with the report produced is something we also believe to be worthy of
2 consideration.
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4 Experience, as all other psychological phenomena, happens within time, both when lived and when
5 reported, and most often both do not overlap. Reports of experiences are the result of communicative acts
6 addressed to an audience, and therefore are tailored according to the speaker's communicative intentions at the
7 time of their uttering. This means they are affected by the position their authors take vis-à-vis what they consider
8 to be the task they need to carry out. This no doubt should make one suspicious of their value as reflections of
9 the conscious processes at the time of experiencing the actual situation. However, such communicative acts are
10 undoubtedly also a type of experience.
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19 These forms of experience reporting have to be considered with caution. They share some referential
20 content with the experience previously lived, which may be believed to be preserved, to some extent, even if
21 transformed - unless one had reason to believe the informant had the intention to disguise their inner intentions,
22 to lie to or misguide the researcher. However, there is little doubt that the author shifts his/her position when
23 producing the report in contrast to the position taken when involved in the ongoing lived situation. Nevertheless,
24 if this happens it may also leave some traces in the structure and content of the report which can be spotted by
25 the researcher.
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34 Any kind of prompt, questionnaire or interview (no matter how open they may be) sets boundaries and
35 provides a structure to the reports produced by informants. On the one hand, when participants are producing a
36 report they are well aware of acting as subjects in some sort of experiment, a position very different to that of
37 being involved in an open 'natural' situation. Also, when the report requires answering questions, one may feel
38 compelled to respond, to give more or less detailed answers, or to refrain from saying anything at all. Whatever
39 the case, it is not very likely that anybody would say anything about experiences one may have felt but has not
40 been asked for. The researcher is then placed before the quandary of choosing between structuring questions
41 following a theoretical model of the situation previously developed, or leaving a blank space to be filled by
42 whatever the participant (or rather the subject) may believe that to be relevant for their interpretation of the task.
43 We chose the first strategy. We presented participants a set of questions derived from a model of the
44 microgenesis of experiences, presented below.
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58 It may be argued that this strategy of data gathering leads to a bias in the data. This is something we
59 cannot dismiss, but we also believe it is a toll worth paying in exchange for reliable records and a valid
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1 interpretation. The combination of different techniques of data gathering is also useful for these purposes. On-
2 line observations of behavior, self-reports and narratives about the lived situation can provide not only
3 complementary information, but also increase the possibility of better grasping the nuances of its genesis (see
4 Rosa and González, in press).
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10 **Stories about the situation lived.**

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This task was aimed at exploring participants' understanding of the situation they had just lived. To this
purpose we went first into examining the content of the stories produced. One way of doing so is by contrasting
the *narrative events* appearing in the narratives produced and the transcription of the different scenes in which
the activity was divided for the purpose of analysis. Narrative events are generally understood to refer to a
change in state produced as a result of a cause acting throughout time, which may be an agent's move or
intentional action (for an overview see Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005). This allowed us to relate the events
appearing in each story to the themes of the particular scenes the *ex post hoc* script was made up of (see table 1).
The result is that narrative events and scenes do not coincide, since many of the latter are often skipped, and
others sometimes compiled together within the same narrative event. All narratives are different in content and
form. Table 2 gathers together the content and structural features of the stories produced.

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Table 2. Type of story and number of narrative events per scene.

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The analysis of the content of the narratives (see Table 2) shows some convergences and divergences.
Out of the 15 scenes, scene 3 (actress calls actor's attention) appears at least once in all narratives. The actress'
calling out the young man (Cristian⁵) who used the phone is the only scene to appear in all narratives; it seems
that most students took this to be the beginning of the situation. Early scenes are the most mentioned (3, 4, and
5), as well as scene 12, where two Spanish students introduce other topics into the discussion. Most participants
place the peak of dramatic tension at the beginning (scenes 4 and 5), when the use of the telephone is initially
discussed and then leads to a dispute about cultural and identity issues, comparing Spain and Argentina. Scene
10 (Cristian said he was calling his mother in hospital) is mentioned only in 5 accounts, something quite amazing

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⁵ All names are fictional.

at first glance, since its inclusion has the potential of being a very significant element in the plot. This is something we will discuss at a later stage.

It has to be pointed out that as the incident developed, and verbal violence increased, some students became suspicious and spotted the camera over the lecturer's table and spread the news to neighboring students they were acquainted with. This happened throughout scenes 5, 6 and 7, around the time the discussion started to shift from the use of the telephone to a quarrel around ethnic and ideological issues. Figure 1 shows the temporal and spatial pattern of the spreading of this interpretation.

After a closed analysis of all the narratives collected, we described and compared the following formal characteristics: a) the *theme* (whether it was a discussion among students, or a fake situation); b) the *genre* (primary, secondary or more elaborate – see Bakhtin 1982); c) whether the events were narrated in first person or portrayed as coming from an omniscient narrator (*3rd person*); and c) the type of *arguments* employed (narrative, not narrative, or a mixture of both). These dimensions allowed for their distribution into four distinctive types (see table 2) (for more details about the procedure see Rosa, Gonzalez and Barbato 2009). They are as follows:

A) *Naive accounts* (10 participants). They are very detailed descriptions of a situation that appears to have been lived as real. They conceptualize the situation as a discussion which first centered on the illegitimate use of the telephone and then on differing visions of Spain and Latin America and explicitly pointed out that some participants drew out prejudices, stereotypes, etc. They tend to present events in chronological order, resembling a transcription and in most cases (7 out of 10) are written in first person singular. They are true chronicles that describe rather than interpret the lived situation. This kind of narrative is typical of the students who took the situation to be real, as was Laura's case.

“A young man used the lecturer's cell when he was out of the classroom. A young woman asked him what he had done and he answered that it didn't matter, and whether she thought it was wrong. She said it was, that what he had done was pilferage, that he had stolen. He got nervous and said he didn't know about that but that in his country that was not stealing.

Then she mumbled that he came from the jungle. He got angry and another Argentinean guy who also was offended and said “You're all the same”, meaning that all Spaniards thought the same thing of Latin Americans. A Puerto Rican girl also took part and told the guy that what he had done was wrong but that it was also wrong to say that it was a jungle, and that if it was a jungle it was the best jungle.

1 I asked what Spaniards thought of Argentines because I hadn't been here for long. A guy answered
2 "that they steal". An argument started about whether all Argentines were the same, if what he had
3 done was "good or bad". The discussion also focused on Spaniards' attitudes towards other ways of
4 thinking and on the predominant types of logic in their country.
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8 "less free", "more alienated", "economic crisis", "it's the same thing", "they are running to get to the
9 same place", "differences aren't better or worse" were some of the phrases people used and that stayed
10 with me as far as I can remember" (Laura's narrative)
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15 X) *Pseudonaïve/sarcastic chronicles* (3 participants). We could also call this group *paradoxical*, as these
16 participants seem to have realized somewhere along the course of events that it was a simulation. In spite of
17 this, since they were asked to describe what happened, they followed the instructions and created a first
18 person narrative in which they describe the situation as though they had lived it as real, and presented many
19 of the formal features of the naïve group. Comments about the events or/and the use of sarcasm, are a
20 distinguishing feature of this kind of narrative. Santi's story is the most outstanding of this kind.
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28 "Today I went to [...] class. The class was full. There were many students I had never ever seen before.
29 That's funny! I thought. The lecturer, after coming in, said he had forgotten something and left. Right
30 away, a guy who looked a bit older got up and took the lecturer's phone, which was on the lecturer's
31 desk. Without further ado, he starts talking on the phone while holding the door open, apparently to
32 watch the corridor. After a few seconds, he leaves the phone back where it was and sits down. Right
33 after he sat down I noticed how some of us had "consciously" witnessed what had happened. I decided I
34 would rather not take action. But a girl seemed to be outraged and started telling him off. She told him
35 that what he'd done wasn't right and said that maybe it was because he was a foreigner. That's when an
36 argument around that started. First of all, a second character showed up, who was also Argentinean and
37 who was outraged at what our colleague was saying. The argument turned to nationality, and another
38 Argentinean girl started talking. So we found ourselves in the middle of a bitter debate where it seemed
39 they were all Argentinean. Even a Puerto Rican girl sided with the first girl, and reprimanded the guy
40 who'd made the phone call. At the end I think we all realized, probably too early on, that we were the
41 object of some sort of experimental design that was too realistic. So most people's attitude was to stay
42 quiet and listen, enjoying, of course, the actors' superb performance." (Santi)
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B) *Distal argumentative narratives* (6 participants). This kind of narratives also focus on the intercultural theme, but never use the first person, which suggests less personal involvement. They too resemble a chronicle, but also offer explanations on what happened.

“A student took advantage of the fact that the lecturer had had to leave the classroom to use the phone he’d left on the desk.

A girl saw what had happened and reprimanded him, saying what he’d done wasn’t right and that it could affect the rest of the students of that module. The guy, who was Argentinean, said that he didn’t see he’d done anything wrong and that he could do that in his country, that it wasn’t seen as something bad. The girl who’d told him off said she didn’t care what people did in his country, because we were in Spain. From that moment on, prejudices and stereotypes started flowing, first against Argentineans (and were then generalized to the whole of the Latin American population), which meant that an Argentinean guy that hadn’t said anything yet also joined in and complained about the prejudice that was being used (one of the phrases used was he “came from the jungle”). An Argentinean and a Puerto Rican also joined in and complained about stereotypes and Spain’s view on Latin Americans.

Two other guys joined into the complaints and arguments and defended their view on the topic. Finally, the one who’d made the call explained his situation, that he didn’t have money to phone his mother who was in hospital and that he saw an opportunity and took it and that he apologized if anyone had been offended and he would tell the lecturer. Shortly after the argument went back to prejudice, the lecturer came back. (Jacinto)

C) *Social scientific descriptions* (5 participants). This group is different from the previous ones in the theme they develop. Here students clearly report that they have been through a fictitious situation. This creates strong differences with the other groups, as these subjects not only describe what happened but also offer rather sophisticated non-narrative arguments to interpret the events, often (three out of five) using the first person. They use concepts taken from their training as future psychologists. This makes them seem social scientists observing the on-going activity from the outside. Aurelio and Pedro (who had noticed from the beginning that the activity was a simulation and chose to act as provocateurs to stir up participation) produced narratives of this kind.

“A conflict between two classmates started. At the beginning a girl (actress) told off a guy for having used the lecturer’s phone without his permission (the lecturer was not in the classroom). The discussion

1 first focused on a moral question (our morals), which evolved to look at multiculturalism. The critical
2 point was when the guy (who was identified as a foreigner) justified his behavior as appropriate in his
3 culture. As that explanation was in stark contrast to “our values” the reply was using an insult that is
4 considered to be quite negative in our culture. The climax reached at that point was enough for
5 participants to “be” sufficiently committed to give their opinion on the topic. Four people, who were
6 supposedly not aware of it being a simulation, took up the topic (though two of them had realized nearly
7 from the start). There was a debate from a personal and cultural perspective on the “fact”. At the end,
8 they took quite extreme positions to provoke or to present more objective views on the evolution of
9 societies and the relationship among them. (Fabricio)

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12 To sum up, the participants who believed they were involved in a genuine incident tended to produce
13 quite detailed narratives, in a well-structured chronological order. In contrast, those who had at some stage
14 realized they were before some kind of experiment took a more detached attitude, often writing as omniscient
15 narrators and adding their observations to their comments. The latter narratives tend to skip the scenes they
16 believed irrelevant for what they take to be the main focus of the experiment (Cristian’s illegitimate telephone
17 call), and so left aside all elements of the ethnic and ideological discussion from scene 7 onwards. Cristian’s
18 defense of having phoned his mother is mentioned only in this group (Clarice, a French student is the only naïve
19 participant who mentions this). However, there are three participants who, in spite of being fully aware of the
20 simulation, produced fairly detailed accounts of the whole incident, as if they were playing being proper
21 “experimental subjects”. Some of the participants who from very early on were aware of the simulation produced
22 narratives which included fairly elaborate academic analytical categories, as if they were being careful to show
23 they were not naïve at the time, but shared the interest of the instructor/researcher on the observation of the
24 behavior of their fellow participants.

25 26 27 **Retrospective self-reports of lived experiences.**

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30 Immediately after writing the narratives, participants were asked to answer a set of open questions
31 aimed at studying the genesis of individual experiences throughout the unfolding situation. The questions, of a
32 fairly analytical nature, asked what made participants think that something unusual was happening, what feelings
33 they experienced at the time, what drive to act they felt, which courses of action they considered, and what they
34 eventually decided to do. These were followed by another series of questions on moral aspects: what they

considered to be the right course of action at the time, what they thought later they should have done, and how they judged their own actuation during the activity at the moment of writing the self-report. These questions were devised following a semantic approach to the analysis of action advanced by Rosa (2007a; 2007b) and further produced in Rosa and Gonzalez (2006; in press).

A semiotic model for the analysis of the development of experiences

Figure 2 shows a graphic model of how experience develops into an understanding of the situation and a personal positioning before the on-going episodes. The model takes experience to be the result of a chain of semiotic actuations with the ability to produce higher order signs and meanings based on more elementary signs. Each semiosis involves three components: a *sign* referring to an object, the *object* [an alterity to be ascertained] and an *interpretant* (a higher order sign which compiles the interpretation of the relationship between the sign and the object); the latter acts a *sign* for the following semiosis)⁶. The understanding process progresses throughout several steps marked by the kind of alterity addressed. In semiotic terms the transition between these steps can be characterized as a substitutive semiosis, in which the final interpretant (the higher order sign resulting from the experience of an otherness) turns into the function of object for the next series of recursive semiosis. The successive repetition of such processes makes possible to account for the construction of entities such as events or one's self. This model can also provide a semiotic explanation of the sense of behavior, thinking, moral reasoning, and moral feelings. A more detailed presentation of each of these steps follows.

Fig. 2 A semiotic model for the analysis of actuations in context

First step: encounter with the situation. The first step for the constitution of experience is a sort of spontaneous reaction to something unusual. When the normal flow of events breaks (first alterity - the unexpected *object*) one feels an affection (Russell, 1983) which simultaneously acts as a sign of two different objects: the episode and the self. The resulting interpretant is a feeling which simultaneously appraises the two objects involved. This feeling then acts as a sign for an interpretation of how one is affected by the episode - the drive for action and overt spontaneous reaction (*final interpretant*), that is a sort of spontaneous abductive understanding of the unexpected happening.

⁶ This is an application of Peirce's semiotic logic to the analysis of semiotic action, as suggested by Rosa (2007a).

Feelings are signs for the appraisal of a situation, which can be characterized within a two pole continuum (objective-subjective) according to the degree in which they lean either to elements of the perceived environment or to how one's self feels affected by an event lived (Fridja 2004; Scherer 2004). They may also gather a sort of judgment of the experience lived. Particular feelings could stress one of these aspects more than the others. This allowed us to distinguish different types of feelings among those reported by the participants.

All participants reported that they realized something uncommon was happening when Maria called Cristian out on the use of the cellular phone. They all (except one) also reported having had feelings immediately afterwards. A brief description of how these first kinds of experiences appear in the participants self-reports follows:

- a) Feelings referred to the self, such as uneasiness, fear, and indifference. Within this first group we also placed what we called *reflective* feelings, which showed a moral positioning (indignation, injustice, embarrassment for somebody else's behavior), or even the feeling of witnessing an unbelievably ridiculous situation, as though they were part of a joke.

I was amazed at what was happening and was a bit scared as to what might happen after the incident.
(Carola)

Tension, very nervous, uncomfortable. I didn't feel indignant. I felt surprised, ashtonished, out of place.
I can't find the right word to define the feeling. (Cristiana).

When the argument started I felt a bit embarassed by what the girl was saying and irritated by what I sensed was going to happen. (Angelica)

I took the beginning to be a joke, how stupid the argument was. (Aurelio).

- b) *Orientation feelings*, leaning toward a better understanding of the situation, such as surprise, estrangement, curiosity.

Surprised by what the Argentinean student was doing. (Roxy)

What I mostly felt was lost. I didn't understand what was going on, why two people in my class were arguing. I tried to pay attention because I was also a bit curious to find out what had happened.
(Jacinto)

- c) Feelings referred to a third party (such as anger).

A bit of agitation, even aggressiveness because of the guy's arrogant attitude. (Gustavo)

The final point of this first set of semiosis (*interpretant*) is the immediate reaction or impulse to respond. This acts as the first subjective understanding of the situation. Several such reactions were reported:

- a) *Quitting* the situation (e.g., feeling the urge to leave the classroom or withdrawing from the situation through some sort of distractive); e.g.,

I opened my newspaper and tried to avoid it (Anita)

I started to read on another module, though I couldn't help listening and paying attention to what was being said. (Lucía)

- b) Asking for *clarification* by asking some fellow student about their opinion about what was going on;

My reaction was to look at both of them (girl and alleged student) and then to look at my colleague (...) Then I whispered to her "Have you seen it? What happened?" Then I spoke to my other colleagues who were sat near me. We looked at each other, amazed. (Cristiana).

- c) Paying more attention by *listening* to the discussion; or feeling the drive to *speak* and join the discussion.

First I paid attention to the arguments that were being used to accuse or justify the fact and then I joined in according to my judgment. (Gustavo)

Saw what was going on and then shared my opinion about what had happened. He was Argentinean, so it affected me to some extent. I had also listened to part of the conversation and I felt I was telling him not to worry and that everything was going to be fine. But I also didn't agree with the way he was talking. (Laura, Argentinean student)

Second step: Figuring out what to do. Positioning. After the first encounter with the situation, one has to figure out what kind of situation one is facing and what to do. This, as opposed to the previous situation (when caught by surprise), is a process that happens over time. The scene does not stop developing while one is trying to elaborate some sort of story to make sense of what is happening. In the meanwhile, one cannot avoid being affected by what is going on. At this point, feelings are no longer just signs appraising events of the

environment, but also signs of how one feels one is affected by those events; they turn into signs of the self, and so also appraise the positions one may take when exploring alternative arguments within an abductive deliberative process aimed at producing a story about what is happening. From a semiotic point of view, these arguments are ‘actuations’ resulting from the activation of ‘intentional schemas’ (Rosa 2007a) which bring together cognitive and emotional actions. What is to be ascertained is the kind of event one is experiencing, so that one can decide what to do. This deliberative process is what Harré calls an act of positioning. The position one eventually takes in a situation results from the story one tells oneself, which also includes a specific assignment of rights and duties to all the intervening actors, including oneself. This implies a moral dimension, a kind of final causality that cannot be dispensed of when studying human social actions (Harré 2012).

The alterity to be understood now (the object) is one’s own position within the situation. The set of semiosis which underlay this positioning process produce arguments, each of which essays a different way of simultaneously constituting a narrative event, oneself as an actor within a story, and eventually leading to the inferring of a situational rule, actualized through an overt actuation (that may also be an inhibition from acting), which is the final interpretant at this stage.

Deliberation is not only discursive and rational; it is also emotional and rhetorical. One may expect the path of action chosen to be the result of an interpretation of the situation that attempts to preserve a sense of self. When this is taken into account, what appears in the self report cannot be taken to be a faithful rendering of what was experienced several minutes previously, but also resulting from a communicative act addressed to the researchers. This leads us to think that what is reported is not only a differed expression of what was felt at the time, but also a result of self-reflection on themselves and their feelings, both in the situation experienced and later, when putting them across in written form.

At first I reacted calmly, but later on I got upset and stated my point of view. (...) The situation made me feel involved in the discussion, as I have values and what the Argentinean did was wrong (Roxy’s self-report).

To speak or shut up. I spoke. I felt the guy wasn’t right and was using unfair arguments. That’s what motivated my intervention (Gustavo).

I was outraged at what the girl in blue [Maria] and the curly haired guy [Aurelio] were saying. I also felt angry and didn’t understand how they could really think that. I felt like taking part and saying that what they were saying was stupid, but I kept quiet. The two possibilities I felt were keeping quiet and

1 listening or talking to take part in the discussion (mostly, against the girl in blue). (...) The process that
2 led me to act by keeping quiet was that I thought my intervening would not add anything new to the
3 discussion and other people were saying things I shared. I didn't think my intervention was necessary.
4 (Amelia).
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8 I thought about whether to take part or not, and in the end I decided against it. It wasn't my business.
9 When the debate carried on I thought about leaving the classroom, and then I realized I would rather
10 stay and see how the incident panned out. Once I thought it was a set up I didn't feel like saying
11 anything anymore. (Teresa)
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17 When I was clear about the camera I wanted to share it. I didn't so as not to obstruct the study. I just
18 exchanged signs with a colleague. As I mentioned, I thought about sharing the information, which I
19 thought only I was aware of. I didn't so as not to ruin the experiment. (Santi)
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24 I felt like intervening and saying that Argentineans weren't badly regarded in Spain and asking people
25 to calm down (...) I thought of acting to calm the situation but I didn't, out of cowardice and fear of
26 being judged. (Anita's self report)
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31 Attack the Argentinean for how he was replying and tell the Spaniard that he was a dick for speaking
32 about Argentina like that. (...) I thought about speaking my mind and opposing the Argentinean because
33 he was generalizing. I tried to mediate between them and said what I thought was right. (Laura).
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38 Third step: Judging one's behavior. The last step involves judging one's own behavior once the situation is well
39 past. It brings together what participants thought when filling the self-report about how they behaved within the
40 situation; a judgment that often also leads to moral feelings, and which may refer either to one's actuation, or to
41 oneself as a person. We believe this can be ascertained by looking into the actual wording employed.
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47 Natural, I acted on instinct. I felt attacked. If I could turn back the clock I wouldn't act any differently. I
48 am who I am and I have my values. If someone attacks me I am going to defend myself, not just as a
49 Puerto Rican, but as the human being that I am, with natural and legal rights. (Roxy)
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54 It was what I established I needed to do, or rather, I wanted to do. It was partly a reaction and a way of
55 starting a conversation. (Laura)
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59 As a coward for not having said what I was thinking. (Anita)
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1 *I don't know how I would judge it. What I do know is that if everything were real and I had not been*
2 *aware of it being a fake situation, if I hadn't taken part I would have felt bad. (Santi).*

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4 *I think I was modest. However, I didn't add anything to the debate because I don't understand the*
5 *language well enough for that. On the other hand, I don't think there was a right or wrong answer.*
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8 (Victoire, French student)
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10 **Synthesizing a stream of experiences into a first person lived story**

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So far we have described, firstly, participants' stories about the elements of the situation they had just been through they believed to be relevant; and, secondly, some of the experiences participants reported. Our next section aims to examine the process through which experiences unfolded so that an understanding of the lived situation could be achieved; and, if possible, to shed some light on how the participants governed their behavior and with what purpose.

Trajectories of experience and mesogenetic sampling

The method we are going to apply for this purpose is inspired by the trajectories of living developed by Sato, Yasuda, Kido, Arakawa, Mizoguchi and Valsiner (2007). These authors produced a systemic model describing how socio-cultural life events create biographical trajectories. Bifurcation and equifinal points of the life trajectory model were taken as criteria for a historical structured sampling of biographical data, so that life trajectories could be described in a way capable of simultaneously accounting for the regularities and the variability observed among different individual biographies.

Sato et al. addressed experience in the *long durée*. They looked at how lived events appeared in life histories and shaped the development of one's lived experience. In contrast, our interest here is in a shorter span of time. The synthetic experiences we are examining take minutes, rather than years or milliseconds, this is the reason behind our choice of the term *mesogenetic* as a way of emphasizing the duration of a process which is neither microgenetic nor ontogenetic.

The semiotic model presented above was instrumental in the gathering of experience samples from the participants in the activity. We will now proceed to put all these pieces together for each individual case, so we

can produce a description of the varieties of synthetic experiences and behaviors observed, and eventually attempt an explanation for their varieties and commonalities.

Table 3 collects the experiences sampled as reported by participants. They have been arranged according to the type of referent the experiences were oriented towards: the self, the situation faced, or fellow participants. Data were categorized according to empirical criteria by agreement between two different raters.

Table 3 Reported experiences

Individual trajectories of experiencing can be graphically represented by moving from left to right along the temporal stream of experiences sampled in each participant's report. This can easily be done by tracing lines connecting each participant's name where appearing in each of the columns presented in table 3. Each trajectory is a depiction of how the situation was understood, the moral position taken, and how the participant felt about her/his behavior. So viewed, trajectories of experience are representations of how contents of experience get structured and gain significance as time develops. The result of this procedure is a graphic depiction of each participant's trajectory of experiencing. Some of these trajectories are quite variegated, particularly where self-reports are rich in content. In these cases individual trajectories typically fork at the beginning.

There are no identical trajectories. However, when the twenty four individual trajectories are examined together some patterns emerge. This allows us to classify them into four types, according to the positions taken. They are as follows.

1st trajectory of experience: Active involvement in the situation.

This kind of trajectory shows in all the students who actively participated in the discussion⁷ (with the exception of Pedro). Four of them reported having felt uncomfortable, two surprised, and one angry. The first reaction for all was to participate, although they all also pondered whether to go ahead or to keep listening. All of them took a moral position, reproved Cristian's act, and felt they acted correctly. Aside from these common features, there are some differences among them worthy of commentary.

⁷ Roxy, Laura, Carola, Gustavo and Aurelio.

1 Roxy (Puertorrican) and Laura (Argentinean) were attending their first class shortly after arriving in
2 Madrid. Both took the situation to be genuine until they were informed by the teacher. This genuine involvement
3 in the situation left its mark in their narratives, which are first person naïf chronicles. They felt uncomfortable
4 with the situation created, concerned because of the identity issues brought into the discussion, and willing to
5 participate. Roxy initially did not understand very well what was going on and had to ask María for clarification
6 about what she meant when she addressed Cristian as a foreigner. María and Cristian's answers led her to
7 overcome her first impulse to refrain from doing anything and go into vehement participation. Laura, in contrast,
8 kept silent for a while and joined the discussion later by very calmly asking what Spaniards thought of
9 Argentineans.

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19 Carola and Gustavo (Spaniards) initially took the situation to be genuine, but were later both told the
20 incident was faked. Although they felt concerned at first, they were not concerned enough to join the general
21 discussion. They kept to very short interventions – Gustavo merely whispered to Cristian - and they did not join
22 the general discussion. Carola was the only one within this group who reported having felt both fear and
23 curiosity, and being conflicted about whether to quit or participate. This led her to judge herself later as “first a
24 bit of a coward for not participating more, and then as acting correctly, because I spoke a little”. Her narrative
25 was a naïf chronicle written in third person. Gustavo was the only one in this group to point out that he cannot
26 judge his actions, because it was a fictitious situation. His narrative only reported two events, and was very
27 different to others in this group because of the non-narrative arguments included.

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38 Aurelio's case is quite different from the others. He reported having felt uncomfortable at first, and then
39 pressured to refrain from saying anything because of the imposing silence that followed Maria's first call to
40 Cristian. When tension grew, he reported “... I spoke when I noticed it was a simulation. In the beginning I took
41 it as a joke, [because of] how stupid the discussion was. ... I joined in to guide the discussion”. He made it clear
42 that all his participation was aimed at stirring up the situation and “to say things which were not obvious, to
43 clarify the different roles played in the simulation”. However, at the end of the self-report he adopted the
44 position of ‘good experimental subject’ and said that had the situation been real, he would had “asked the
45 Argentinean why he acted like that and offered him my cell if he was penniless, and then tell him that if he
46 needed to phone he should ask somebody for a telephone”. He judged his behavior at “first cowardly,
47 subordinate to social pressure; then, more coherent”. His narrative clearly belongs to the type we have termed
48 “social scientist”.

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61 *2nd trajectory of experience: passive waiting for remorse and guilt for one's inaction.*
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Two female students⁸ showed this kind of trajectory. It starts with a mixture of unease, surprise, and the feeling of having witnessed an unjust action towards the teacher (the use of his telephone). They reacted by looking to their fellow students and trying to figure out what to do, and then kept expectant waiting for Cristian to show remorse for his wrongdoing, or even wondering whether to ask the others if the teacher should be told that somebody had used his telephone. For Cristiana the right thing to do was to report what Cristian had done, and since she did not do so, she eventually reported she had felt like a coward, in spite of becoming aware at some point in the discussion that it was a simulation. Susana said that she thought she should have told Cristian he should confess to the teacher, but since the incident was a simulation she did not have the opportunity to talk to Cristian so she cannot judge whether she behaved rightly or wrongly. Both of their narratives are of the distal kind and were written in third person.

Some excerpts of Cristiana's self-report are very illustrative of this way of living the situation.

I got nervous and tense because the behavior seemed strange to me, because I didn't know when it had happened and because the argument caught me unaware. To me it seemed like bad behavior (underlined in the original) and what I found most disturbing was how, why and when he had done it and, most of all, how he managed to be so calm when justifying it. It's what got me the most (...) I thought to ask if we were going to tell the lecturer when he came back. But I kept quiet, I think out of embarrassment (...) I think we should have told the lecturer what happened in class, at least so he knew that someone had phoned Argentina from his phone during his class and to let him know about the problem (underlined in the original) (...) Cowardly, for having kept quiet. Though I can't say whether I would have taken part in the discussion if I hadn't realized it was simulation. I only judge myself for my behavior then. (Cristiana)

3rd Trajectory: mediation with guilt.

This group of trajectories gathers five students⁹. All of them felt uneasy and some also reported fear and indignation. The only exception was Clarice (French student) who said she asked Victoire, seated beside her, for clarification about what was going on. All the others, except Anita, felt initially inclined to join the discussion in order to mediate. However, the only one who did so was Pedro, who very actively took to the floor at the end of

⁸ Susana and Cristiana.

⁹ Beatriz, Clarice, Romina, Anita and Pedro.

the discussion, after having restrained before his first impulse to speak (he was sitting with Aurelio and Fabricio and was already aware of it being a simulation when he joined the discussion). He said that when he spoke his purpose was “to reconcile both discourses from an outsider’s position”. However, he was not happy with his participation; he reported he should have kept quiet, “because there reaches a point when people need to wake up to the fact that they are consuming characters (discourses) and scenes and I’m not going to exhaust myself trying to prove it to them” He judged his participation as “paternalistic”. The rest of this group also wanted to restore peace and simultaneously rejected Cristian’s action and Maria’s chauvinistic comments. They were all either unsatisfied with their behavior, or felt cowardly for not having done what they believed to be right. Aside from Pedro, who described the situation following the social science report genre, they all produced naïf chronicle narratives, including Beatriz, who became aware of the simulation when a fellow student told her. This did not prevent her from feeling bad about her behavior. Three students within this group (Anita, Clarice, Romina) do not seem to have realized the situation was simulated.

The following fragments from Beatriz’s self-report are expressive of how becoming aware of the simulation when the incident was already in progress seems to not have eliminated the sense of guilt.

As I mentioned, I wanted to take part offering an intermediate point of view to what was being said. At the beginning, I kept quiet to avoid getting involved and getting into trouble. But when I realised the camera was there I decided to go on observing people’s reactions (...) I thought I should get involved and defend what I thought, but I didn’t dare (...) I was a coward and shouldn’t have done it that way. You have to defend your own ideas about justice. If everyone behaved that way, it would all be chaos.
(Beatriz)

4th Trajectory: Inhibition.

This is the kind of trajectory showing in the participants who decided to withdraw from the incident. This is the biggest group of all, comprising half of all participants. However, aside from agreeing to avoid participating, there is enough variability in the trajectories observed to distinguish three different subgroups. Many of the participants who showed this kind of trajectory realized at some point they were in a simulation, which partially explains their inhibition. We examine these three subtrajectories below.

Trajectory 4a: skeptical inhibition

1 This is a group of six female students¹⁰ who reported a rather rich assortment of feelings, which could
2 be characterized as a mixture of unease, incredulity and moral feelings, together with some degree of suspicion
3 about the situation. All of them pondered whether to speak up or to keep listening; regardless of their first
4 reaction (half of them felt like speaking and the other half like listening), and finally decided to avoid getting
5 involved in the discussion. Their moral position was also a reflection of their lack of commitment. All they
6 wanted was the tension to disappear, either by dismissing all the opinions expressed, by partially agreeing with
7 everybody, or by waiting for harmony to be restored. When judging their own actuation they split in two groups,
8 those happy to have refrained from participating, since they think they would have not succeeded in stopping the
9 discussion, and those who quite uncompromisingly stated that something should have been done, but they did
10 nothing.
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21 Amelia and Libia rendered their understanding of the situation through first person naïf chronicles.
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23 Lucía and Iris produced third person distal narratives. María Paola's story about the incident was of the kind that
24 we have termed social scientific account. Only Amelia and Lucía still believed the incident was real until the
25 lecturer said it was a simulation.
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30 Amelia's self-report is a good example of this kind of trajectory.
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33 *When the discussion started, when the main theme became cultural discrediting I was outraged (...) I*
34 *was very surprised by what they were saying. I looked at others to see their reactions, if they also felt it*
35 *was absurd or out of the ordinary. (...) I felt like taking part and saying that what they were saying was*
36 *really stupid, but I kept quiet. (...) The possibilities I considered where wither keeping quiet and*
37 *listening or taking part in the discussion (especially, against the girl in blue [the actress]). The process*
38 *that led me to keep quiet was that I didn't think I would add anything new to the discussion since others*
39 *were saying what I thought. I thought my taking part was unnecessary (...) I would judge them as good*
40 *[her own actions] as I probably would have acted the same. Though I feel I should have talked, I think*
41 *that would not add anything new in the discussion, so I don't think I was wrong to not have said*
42 *anything. (Amelia)*
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54 Teresa is a special case within this group, not only because of her refusal to take a moral standpoint. Her position
55 is more one of avoidance than inhibition, perhaps as the result of having spotted the camera quite early on.
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60 ¹⁰ Lucía, Amelia, Libia, María Paola, Iris y Teresa.
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“I didn’t believe what was going on (...) I felt bad that the debate became racial when it wasn’t about that. I nearly said it but didn’t in the end, I don’t know why (...) I thought about whether to talk or not. In the end I preferred to not get involved, it had nothing to do with me. When the debate dragged on I thought about leaving the classroom, but then I decided I would rather stay and see how it all ended. When I thought it was a set up I didn’t feel like saying anything anymore. (...) (I should have) said (to Cristian) that what he had done was wrong, whatever the nationality of who did it (...) [Judgment on the actuation] It’s good to defend what one thinks, but [to me] it would have been getting in trouble, “ratting out” what was going on. I don’t know whether to keep quiet would have been right or wrong. I suppose it would have been bad for the lecturer and good for me. (Teresa)

Trajectory 4b: disorientation and withdrawal.

Three students¹¹ took this trajectory. All of them reported feelings referred to the situation, such as curiosity or astonishment, and one of them (Fabricio) also fear. Fabricio and Jacinto’s first reaction was to ask other students what that all that was about, while Victoire (a French Erasmus student) reacted by withdrawing from the situation (as did Jacinto), for the length of the discussion, even if at some point she hesitated about whether to leave the room, to listen discreetly or even to refrain from listening. She found everybody’s “position [in the discussion] to be coherent”. When asked about what she thought about doing at the time, she said, “I think I shouldn’t have listened and be so curious because this was none of my business”. This led her to believe she had acted correctly, because she was “discreet”. Fabricio reported that his first reaction was to reprimand María for her manners towards Cristian, and Cristian for what he did, but he refrained from doing anything because he had guessed it was a simulated situation and he did not want to spoil it. In spite of all this, he reported that at the end he thought he had acted “cowardly and not showing a commitment to social relations and individual rights”. Jacinto also was warned that the discussion was not genuine and so refrained from saying anything, although he also informed that had the situation been real, he would have rejected Maria’s and Cristian’s doings. Victoire’s narrative, as could be expected, was a naïf chronicle, while Jacinto’s was a distal third person narrative and Fabricio’s of the social scientific kind.

[I spoke to] those sat next to me about what I understood to be happening to see if they understood it to be different. Then I listened to the discussion while keeping myself separate from it. (...) I thought I could try to calm the situation and act as a moderator to calm them down. But, given their state and

¹¹ Fabricio, Jacinto and Victoire.

1 *because it was more of a moral topic I finally decided to keep to one side (...) Say that using others'*
2 *cells and spending others' money isn't right, but leaving it there. Each person has a right to their own*
3 *moral code as long as it doesn't affect the rest of us. If the lecturer had asked for an explanation later*
4 *on, to let the guy know that everyone would point toward him. But, as for stereotypes and prejudices, I*
5 *don't think that's appropriate and I would have jumped in that situation. If there's anything we've*
6 *learnt in psychology it's to not get carried away by first impressions and to not activate incorrect*
7 *biases. (...) I don't think I would have acted correctly had the situation been real. (Jacinto)*

14 *I thought about giving my opinion and trying to calm people down, though forcefully (I felt it was very*
15 *wrong how the girl was talking to the guy). I didn't because my friend suspected it was all theatre.*
16 *That's why I decided to listen. (Fabricio)*

21 *Trajectory 4c: ironic inhibition.*

24 The three students¹² who produced narratives of the ironic type present a very homogeneous trajectory.
25 The three of them felt uneasy at the beginning (José Miguel was also surprised and curious, and Angelica
26 irritated and ashamed of Cristian's action). They attentively listened to a situation they thought to be quite
27 stereotyped and they soon suspected something odd was going on. When Angelica saw the camera on the table
28 she told José Miguel, who in turn talked to Jacinto and gestured towards it to Santi, and later to Gustavo, and so
29 spread the suspicion that the discussion was a simulation. The three of them pondered whether to warn their
30 fellow students about this, but refrained from doing so (they *exclusively* told their friends) in order not to spoil
31 "the experiment", and so from then on abstained from acting and listened closely. This prevented them from
32 taking a moral standpoint and judging what they did, since they did not act as 'experimental subjects', but as an
33 audience.

45 *I didn't feel I needed to do anything, at least not after the first few minutes of the discussion, when I did*
46 *observe whether it was necessary to take part. I soon realized that I had heard this same type of discussion*
47 *thousands of times and nothing was going to happen. (...) I thought I should keep quiet so as not to add*
48 *fodder. There were already five people heated up in their own discourse, enjoying listening to themselves*
49 *say stuff and I felt it would be a mistake to go into that game of defending identities. (...) It would have been*
50 *reasonable to show them both to what point they were used as ventriloquists' puppets, how there was a*

60 ¹² José Miguel, Santi and Angelica.

1 stereotype that was speaking through them. They could have been shown how they didn't ultimately care
2 about the guy having taken the phone but that they were playing the part that they "had to" play.
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4 (Angelica).

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6 As soon as the incident happened, I decided it was none of my business. I was just surprised and listened. As
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8 I said, at that stage I had come up with several explanations for my surprise (...) I quickly decided to take a
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10 passive position (...) As I mentioned, I thought about sharing the information, which I thought only I was
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12 aware of. I didn't so as not to ruin the experiment. [in spite of what he reports, video recordings show Santi
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14 and José Miguel making eye contact and pointing towards the camera with their eyes]. I also considered the
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16 possibility of taking part, though I finally didn't because I thought it was pointless. The motivation was just
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18 not there anymore. (...) I thought the best thing was for me to keep quiet and observe closely. (Santi)
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24 **Personal position and understanding of the situation**

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27 Data gathering was devised in such a way as to proceed in the opposite direction to that of the unfolding
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29 of the process while the situation was being experienced. Participants were first prompted to tell us the story of
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31 the situation they had just lived and, immediately afterwards, to report a sample of the stream of experiences
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33 they had as the situation unfolded. These experiences were sampled according to the semiotic model presented
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35 above. This model is devised in a way that allows the analysis of the increasing complexity of the structure of
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37 experience. Experiencing is then conceived to be a developmental process leading to personal positioning.
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41 Participants, when composing the story of the situation lived and reporting their experiences, were not
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43 only recounting first person experiences, but also communicating with the researchers. This means records result
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45 from two types of position: regarding the incident lived, and that of communicating with a figure of authority.
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47 This obviously poses a challenge for the interpretation of the records gathered. Our task now is to tell these two
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49 kinds of positions apart.
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51 *Shifting positionings*

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54 The position each participant took regarding a 20 minute scene obviously changed as the incident
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56 developed. In contrast, the position in the reporting situation was clearly set: they were 'experimental subjects'
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58 filling out an open questionnaire. When answering the questions, they could have felt tricked and refrain from
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60 handing over the questionnaire (two students chose to do so), decided to fill it out in a perfunctory way (as
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1 Beatriz did), or to cooperate (as we believe to be the case with the other 23 students). Whatever the case, when
2 writing their report they are forced to tell the researchers (one of whom is also the owner of the telephone and the
3 teacher who was to grade them on the course that was just beginning) whether they are proud of having acted the
4 way they did, or otherwise explain how and why they behaved as the video recording would surely show. In
5 sum, their reports are the result of negotiating not only the demands of the task presented, but also a saving face
6 exercise before a figure of authority. The written records they provide and the video recordings are all we have
7 to infer their positions regarding the situation and the reporting task.
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14 The types of narratives presented above and the different trajectories we have just examined have been
15 arranged according to the formal features resulting from the application of the procedures devised for the
16 analysis of each kind of record. If every personal position vis-à-vis the situation experienced results from settling
17 experiences into a story to make sense to what is happening, then trajectories and narratives should be
18 compatible. Very often that is the case, and the names given to the trajectories appear to be a good description of
19 the position taken while the scene was in progress. However, there are other cases where incoherences show.
20 This led us to examine the records more closely in order to look for clues which may explain these discordances.
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30 Whenever the examination of content showed some mismatch between the records, this was taken to be
31 a mark of a shift in position when performing the reporting task. Formal features of the records gathered (the use
32 of first or third person, the theme and type of narrative produced, the shape their trajectory of experiencing
33 showed, or the self-evaluation) were taken into account for a new classification of positions (see table 4) capable
34 of encompassing both the position taken during the incident, and when filling the requested records afterwards.
35 Before going into an examination of these cases, we will report some of the results of the analysis of the video
36 recordings.
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45 *Dynamics of involvement in the situation and positioning: video recordings and written reports.*

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48 It is worth noting that only the four foreign students (two French, one Argentinean and one Puerto
49 Rican) and three Spaniards believed they were living a real incident all the way through. The remainder
50 suspected at some point, and some were certain they were being subject to some sort of faked situation related to
51 the content of the course that was starting. Their reports show (and the video recordings corroborate) that about
52 five minutes after the start (around the time Laura and Aurelio joined in) many had started to smell a rat. As
53 some of them report, too many foreign strangers were speaking and too many Spaniards they knew were silent.
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Once chauvinism was openly stated, the situation looked too far-fetched for many. This partly explained why so many participants kept quiet for so long.

There is a difference, however, between being suspicious, being told the situation is simulated, and firmly believing that one is immersed in some kind of experiment. The latter is clearly the case of the three authors of pseudo-naïve ironic chronicles, and less so of the two ‘provocateurs’¹³. The former took a spectator position from very early, taking good care to not interfere in ‘the experiment’. The latter decided to take the floor, although each in a different fashion. Aurelio decided to raise awareness by ironically stating extremist chauvinistic comments and then moving into the opposite direction confusing everybody. Pedro only joined the discussion later when he could not resist mediating, although he did so in such a roundabout manner that he only added more confusion and made the situation completely unbelievable for most. Gustavo and Beatriz were warned by others and sharply shifted their position remaining quite aloof for the rest of the scene. Other students did not seem to have been totally sure whether they were within a simulated situation. It looks as if the news influenced them rather mildly, and did not have much of an effect on their feelings and attitudes, although that suspicion was often a perfect excuse for their inhibition. All participants have been ordered in table 4 from top to bottom according to the position taken in the situation.

Table 4 Position regarding the situation and the report and formal features of the reports

Dynamics of position regarding the incident

The five minutes during which all students believed they were living a real situation seems to have left a strong mark on the way all of them experienced and conveyed the situation. During this time the great majority refrained from active participation, leaving plenty of space for the only two genuine Latin American students to voice their discomfort with the on-going discussion.

Genuine participants. Roxy and Laura’s records show the signs of genuine participation in a situation they thought affected them directly because of the identity issues raised.

Shifting from genuine participant to spectator. Only three Spaniards said something to support María and reproach Cristian’s action: Carmen (who chose not to provide a self-report), Carola (who intervened briefly) and

¹³ Both were graduate students with a wide experience of working in Latin American. There they were very active in the defense of indigenous people, sometimes against the exploitation of Spanish companies. One of them was arrested and expelled from one country for participating in this kind of protests.

1 Gustavo (who only whispered to Cristian, who was sat next to him). The latter two quickly shifted their position
2 when the camera was pointed out to them. Gustavo, who had been tense and alert up to then, went into a fit of
3 silent laughter and sat back, refraining from further involvement; this left a heavy mark in his written records,
4 which are full of irony and clearly show that once he was aware of the simulation, he was perfectly capable of
5 analyzing everybody else's behavior in social psychological terms. His irony, but also his moral positioning is
6 clear in the following excerpt:
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11 *Getting the sinner to repent through the use of arguments. Persuade him to come forward as guilty to*
12 *the lecturer. Tear apart the argument that justified it. Expiate through self-revelation and accepting*
13 *he's a sinner.* (Gustavo's self-report, emphasis in the original).
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20 Externally controlled. Waiting for condemnation and confession. Cristian's wrongdoing was the only theme of
21 the discussion at this time, and deeply affected some participants who felt highly agitated although were not
22 resolute enough to say anything. Sandra and Cristiana were waiting for others to take the lead in doing what they
23 thought right: making Cristian show remorse and denounce him to the teacher. Sandra saves face when judging
24 herself, arguing that the situation was not real. In contrast Cristiana judged herself quite harshly: she believes she
25 acted cowardly.
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32 Genuinely agitated by the violence but feeling guilt for not contributing to restore the peace. Other participants
33 also felt distressed by the situation, but not so much because of Cristian's wrongdoing, but because of the rising
34 violence in the discussion. Beatriz, Anita, Romina and Clarice understood they were faced with a discussion
35 between differing points of view in which only improper arguments were raised. They felt something had to be
36 done to mediate and restore peace, but they did nothing. Their inaction made them feel even worse, to the point
37 where half of them called themselves cowards. Beatriz seemed to be irritated by the situation she had to go
38 through. She reported having felt like leaving the classroom after she was told it was a simulation. Her self-
39 report was written in a perfunctory manner. Clarice (French student) said she was not confident enough with her
40 Spanish to participate, but also pointed out that she thinks that moral neutrality is not acceptable.
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53 Inhibition and wishing for a restoration of the peace. Lucía and Amelia understood similarly. They also wanted
54 peace to be restored, but they differed in their resolution and self-judgment. They decided to refrain from doing
55 anything since they thought the situation was hopeless and they would not be adding anything of value. They
56 think they were right in refraining from acting. Lucía took the situation to be real for the duration, and Amelia at
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some time got suspicious (but was not sure). Nevertheless both of them did not feel personally concerned at any time.

Irresolutes with moral remorse. Victoire, Fabricio, Jacinto and Lubia had difficulty figuring out the type of situation they were facing, and asked others for their opinion about what was going on. They justify their inhibition by arguing that they were aware of the simulation at the time. Nevertheless, they also state they had acted incorrectly. It seems they were genuinely disconcerted by the odd situation and could not work out what to do. They were only certain that they did not like it, and they should have done something to bring some sense into the discussion, but they did not feel compelled to do so, since at the time they knew it was a farce. Their self-judgment seems to us to be the result of a perfunctory fulfilling of a ‘testing task’. Victoire is an exception to this; she believed to be facing a genuine discussion and was satisfied with herself, because she was “discreet” and did not interfere in other people’s business.

Morally positioned but personally uncommitted spectators. Maria Paola, Iris and Teresa show an intermediate position. What identifies their position is their lack of personal commitment and the perfunctory self-judgment, probably as a consequence of their awareness of the simulation, but also perhaps of their irritation. Teresa’s excerpt reproduced earlier in this paper is very telling.

Spectators of the “experiment”. The rest of participants understood the situation to be some kind of experiment. Three of them (José Miguel, Angelica and Santi) just relaxed and observed, and made that clear in the records they produced.

The two provocateurs are rather different. Pedro initially decided at the beginning to keep to one side, but got carried away by the violence of the situation (and also by the provocative and contradictory interventions of his friend Aurelio) and joined in using very confusing arguments. He later regretted having spoken and quite sincerely judges his participation as “paternalistic”. Aurelio, however, carried out the report as a proper “experimental subject”, not hiding what led him to participate the way he did, but also judging himself “as if” he had been a naïf participant in a genuine situation.

Discussion

1 It was no surprise to us that some students became aware of the simulation when the discussion was in
2 progress. However, the unexpected spontaneous participation of the ‘provocateurs’ left little room for more
3 genuine participation. On the other hand, this had the effect of highlighting some phenomena that may otherwise
4 have bypassed our analysis.
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8 One such phenomenon is the apparent small influence of moral feelings on individuals’ actions. Out of
9 the seven participants who reported such feelings, only Carola actively participated. She also reported having
10 initially felt afraid and feeling like a coward until she overcame her fear and spoke, and was then happier with
11 herself. It is interesting that besides her, all the students who reported being afraid at the beginning of the
12 conflict, also judged themselves as acting cowardly. The quite widespread acknowledgement of cowardice (an
13 astonishing 25% of participants) caught us by surprise. This, together with the apparently very low ability to deal
14 with conflict participants showed, is a matter we find disturbing and worthy of concern if one believes that
15 encouraging assertiveness and commitment is no negligible part of civic education. It is as though
16 acknowledging guilt was an easy way to be absolved for one’s inability to face a disturbing situation. We do not
17 know whether this is simply something peculiar to this group, a more general characteristic of psychology
18 students with specific training, of Spaniards of this particular generation and social origin, some combination of
19 both, or the consequence of living in an affluent society (data were gathered in the spring semester of 2008), or
20 whether it comes from other unknown factors. Whatever the case, we do believe this is something worthy of
21 further study.
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38 Another interesting phenomenon, although not at all exceptional (e.g., Blasi 2005; Hardy and Carlo
39 2005), is that acknowledging what should be done, and feeling that one should act, is not enough to move to
40 action. Reports show that only people who felt personally involved, either because they believed their identity to
41 be at stake, or because they were aroused by anger, felt animated enough to genuinely participate. The case of
42 the provocateurs was rather different. Both were graduate students who seemed to have joined in with some sort
43 of didactic purpose in mind and were trying to enlighten their younger fellow students.
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51 The results here presented allow describing how the processes of positioning unfold when subjects are
52 immersed in a situation of conflict. However, the type of data collected does not allow us to go deep enough into
53 the examination of the beliefs participants held regarding what should be done in situations of that kind. Aspects
54 of such beliefs do appear in some of the experiences reported, but they are too scarce to permit close scrutiny on
55 the matter. A more systematic exploration of participants’ cultural toolkits for understanding conflict, how they
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conceive misbehavior, justice and civic responsibility, would be needed to go deeper into the study of the dynamics of believing, positioning and acting.

The semiotic model of the synthesis of increasingly complex experiences, and the kind of experiences sampled, made it possible to ascertain diverse trajectories of experience leading to different positions regarding the situation lived. The procedure chosen for rendering data was able to present results in a way that made apparent the observed varieties of experience. The model describes how experiences merge into a structure encompassing a sense of self within the experienced situation, and so allows explaining how one feels to be living an event in first person singular (*vivencia*). Eventually, if the sense of the self is felt to be at stake, *vivencias* turn instrumental for the governance of one's actions, and therefore become indispensable for the study of moral behavior.

The study here presented combines different research strategies. It relies on a semiotic (logical) analysis of the structure of experience. The kind of data chosen to refer to the trajectories of experiencing (whether experiences predominantly refer to the situation faced, to other people in the environment, or to oneself) also takes into account nomotetic knowledge of the kind provided by theories of affect and emotion (Russell 2003), appraisal (Frijda 2004; Scherer 2004), attribution and motivation (Weiner 2000), and identity and the self (Blasi 2005; Hardy and Carlo 2005). The theoretical robustness of the account offered holds up on the application of semiotic formalisms upon an analytical model of structural development of experiences, supplemented with the support provided by nomotetic psychological theories. Empirical validity depends on the ideographic data gathered.

The semiotic model is a structure that describes the shaping of experiences as the understanding of a situation proceeds towards decision making and moral behavior. The model is able to encompass the varieties of trajectories of experience observed. In addition, semiotic formalisms are capable to explain how processes leading to positioning and moral judgments evolve. These features render the model not deterministic, something typical in the studies on solving open-ended problems. The semiotic model and the trajectories of experiencing here presented supply a formal theory of the subjective processes that can only hold if supported by ideographic empirical data.

The recollection of data was guided by the combination of the three tools of knowledge above mentioned: the semiotic model, the kind of experiences taken into account for producing the trajectories of experiencing, and the nomotetic theories summoned for the interpretation of the experiential processes reported

by the participants. They were tailored to suit our research purposes, and therefore they serve as instruments for producing results and guide interpretation to answer the questions asked at the beginning of this paper. Our attempt here was to offer a contribution to the understanding and explanation of how *vivencias* develop within the flow of a particular strip of life. However, it would be naive to believe that the instruments here applied are *omnibus* for any kind of study about the development of *vivencias*. Surely the participants in this study had *vivencias* of many kinds which could not be grasped by the methods employed. Our main interest here was to explore *vivencias* as processes unfolding towards moral positioning, which calls for the self to be placed in the forefront of analysis. If we had chosen to explore something different, e.g., the aesthetic experiences of the group of participants who from the beginning took a detached and ironic view of the incident, the structure of the semiotic model should be different; rather than giving priority to personal positioning, the focus would centre on how *contemplative vivencias* develop, how feelings and perceptions arisen by the observed alterity come to the forefront for guiding action, while the self recedes to a lesser prominent position.

Semiotic logical analysis, nomotetic theories and ideographic studies are the vertices of a triangular area setting the boundaries for the explanation of subjective processes of experiencing and behaving. The knowledge produced about these kinds of processes can only hold if the theoretical tissue knitted between these three vertices is kept in constant tension. Empirical studies can only aspire to weave fabrics for patch working. Quilting these materials together is the unending task of theoretical elaboration. Our attempt here was to try out one path for this undertaking.

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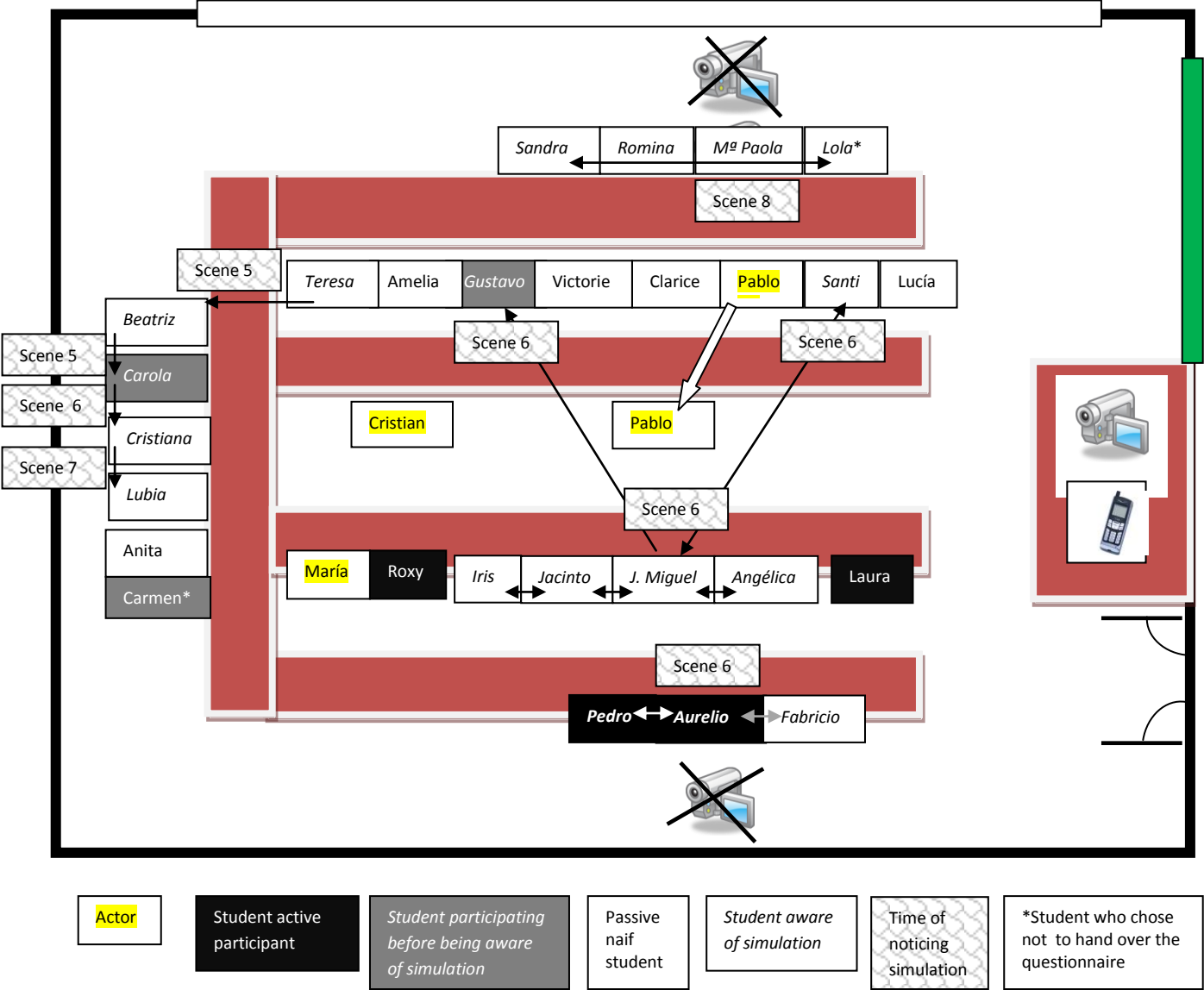
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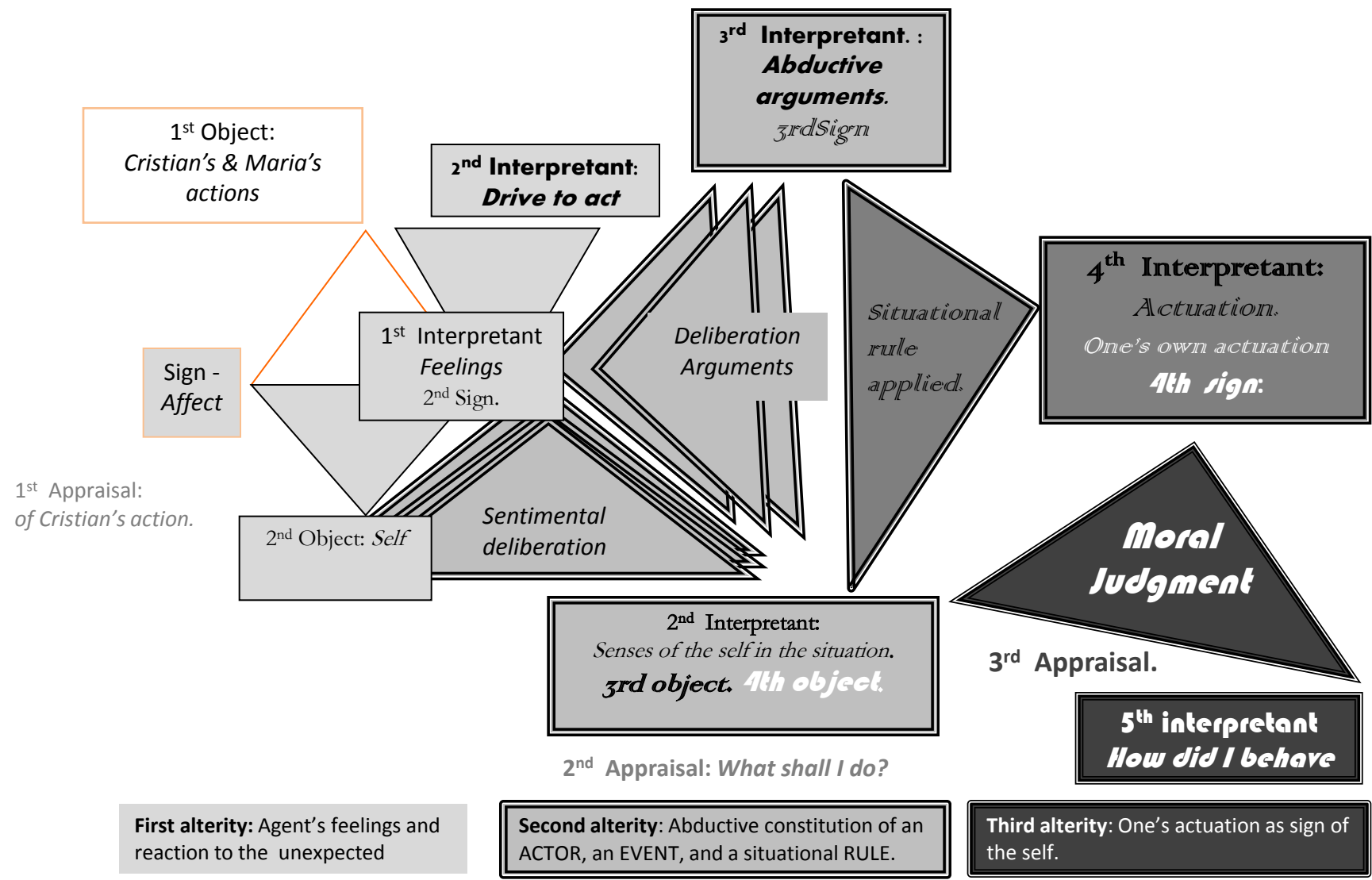
Figure 1



Arrows show how and when the suspicion that the incident was a simulation spread.

Figure 2

An actuation is here presented as a set of semiosis in which new alterities (objects) are constructed as result of the interpretation of previous semiosis/actions



(1) At the beginning of the class the lecturer says he has forgotten something in his office and exits the classroom. He leaves a folder, a cellular phone and a video camera on his desk.

(2) Cristian (Argentinean) gets up, takes the lecturer's mobile phone, stands by the door and makes a phone call to Argentina, while watching the lecturer does not come back. María (Spaniard) sees what Cristian is doing and tells some students sitting nearby.

(3) When Cristian has finished his call he heads back to his seat. María, who is sitting opposite, asks him if he is a friend of the lecturer's. Cristian snaps "no" back. María says what he has done is stealing. An uncomfortable silence fills the room.

(4) Cristian says he does not think using another person's phone is wrong and that in his country that is not a crime.

(5) María answers back "God knows what's a crime in your country" and that he probably comes from 'the jungle'. Another two Argentineans are bothered by the comment and ask her not to generalize.

(6) Two Spanish students (Carmen and Beatriz) say that what is wrong is the act and not the nationality. A discussion starts on the act including the nationality aspect. Laura (Argentinean) says that in Argentina it is a crime to use another person's phone. Roxy (Puerto Rican) joins in the discussion.

(7) Laura asks what Spaniards think of Argentineans and Aurelio answers sarcastically 'that they all steal'.

(8) A discussion starts on the difference between theft and pilferage. Cristian, due to being Latin American in a Spanish university is accused of being upper class.

(9) María is accused of being right wing and in favor of "integration contracts" for immigrants.

(10) Cristian says he phoned his mother who is in hospital.

(11) A Spanish student (Aurelio) says that Spaniards are too bourgeois and do not support solidarity enough. He adds in a sarcastic tone that Europeans believe themselves to be morally superior. Some Latin Americans respond angrily. Roxy says that Puerto Ricans, as part of the US are more advanced than Spaniards. The reply is that they must be less humanized. The topic of racism is brought to the table.

(12) Another Spanish student (Pedro) calls Latin Americans creoles and talks about wealth in Europe and Latin America. This creates an argument with Laura and the actors (Cristian, Maria, Pablo).

(13) Cristian apologizes.

(14) The discussion gets very confusing. Aurelio and Pedro (Spanish students) criticize social and state control and say that Spain would benefit from a freezing of private bank accounts like they had in Argentina in 2001.

(15) The lecturer returns to the classroom and on seeing the confusion asks “What’s going on?”. Students laugh nervously and María answers “It’s nothing. Some of us have different ways of looking at life.”

The lecturer says it was all a simulation, thanks actors for their participation and asks for students’ participation. He hands out the protocols.

We have numbered (in brackets) our breakup of the different scenes, according to the themes discussed in different moments. A complete transcription can be found in Rosa, González and Barbato (2009), and a partial one in Rosa and González (in press). All names are fictional.

Table 2

Type of Story			A) Naive Chronicles										B) Distal Chronicles					X) Ironic chronicles		C) Social Science Accounts					N		
			NARRATIVE EVENTS																								
Time	Scene	Tema	Roxy*	Laura*	Lubia	Aneilia	Ronina	Anita	Clarice	Vivioria	Beatriz	Carola*	Sandra	Lucia	Teresa	Iris	Jacinto	Gustavo*	Angelca	José M.	Santi	Fabrió	Cristiana	M. Paola	Pedro**	Aurelio**	
—	1	The teacher leaves the classroom	-	-	-	-	1	-	-			-	1	1	-		-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	4
—	2	Cristian using mobile	4	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	1		1	-	2	-	3	-	-	-	1	1	20
00:00	3	Actress interpellates to Cristian	2	2	3	2	3	5	2	1	2	1	-	3	1	1	2	1	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	44
01:47	4	First discussion: Jungle and robbing	1	1	3	4	3	-	1	1	3	1	3	-		2	2	1	3	-	-	2	2	1	-	-	34
02:24	5	Jungle. Other Argentines talking.	5	3	1	2	2	2	-	1	1	-	-	3	1	2	2	-	3	1	4	2	2	1	-	4	42
03:32	6	Rosa, Laura & Carmen are talking.	-	1	3	-	1	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	1	2	-	2	2	1	1	21
04:46	7	Laura asks about the opinion of the Spanish about Argentine	-	7	-	1		-	-			-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	15
06:11	8	Hight class and petty theft.	-	-	-	-			1			-	-	-	-		-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3
08:15	9	Actress is right winger.	-	-	-	-		-	-			-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
08:44	10	Cristian say “I phoned to my sick mother”.		-	-	-		-	1		1	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	1	6
09:10	11	Opinion: “The Spanish are bourgeois”. Racism.	2	-	3	1	1	-	-	1		1	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
13:35	12	Pedro theorizes	2	1	1	7	1	1	-			-	-	-	-		2	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	1	1	22
15:43	13	Cristian apologizes	2	1	-	-		-	-			-	-	-	1		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
17:53	14	Simultaneous discussions	2	1	-	-	1	-	-			1	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	9
19:53	15	The teacher returns to classroom	1	-	-	1		-	-			1	-	2	1		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Events per participant			21	18	14	19	14	8	7	7	9	6	9	10	9	9	11	2	19	9	12	6	7	11	4	10	

Number in bolds: Climax of the story told.

Time refers at the moment in which the theme discussed changes. Participants in bold letters got aware of the simulation after 5 minutes of the activity.

* Participants joining the discussion while taking the situation as genuine.

** Participants joining the discussion aware of the simulation (provocateurs).

Table 3

	FEELINGS	REACTION	DELIBERATION	RESOLUTION	MORAL POSITION	JUDGMENT
SELF	Inndifference/ avoidance Lucia, M.Paola					Correct Amelia, Carola, José Miguel, Laura, Lucia, Roxy,Victorie
	Uncomfortable Angélica, Anita, Aurelio, Beatriz, Cristiana, Gustavo, Iris, José Miguel, Laura, Libia, Lucia, Ma.Paola, Romina, Roxy,Santi, Teresa	Quitting Anita, Roxy,Victorie	Quitting Jacinto, Teresa	Inhibition Amelia, Angélica, Fabricio, Iris, Jacinto, José Miguel, Libia, Lucía M. Paola, Santi, , Victorie,	Quitting from the situation Pedro	
	Fear Anita, Carola, Fabricio					Incorrect Aurelio, Iris, Jacinto, M. Paola, Pedro, Romina,Santi
	Moral Amelia, Beatriz, Carola, M.Paola Iris,Sandra, Teresa					Coward Anita, Beatriz, Carola, Cristiana, Fabricio, Libia
	Joke Amelia, Aurelio					
SITUATION	Surprise Amelia, Clarice, Cristiana, Fabricio, Iris, José Miguel, Lucia, M. Paola, Roxy,Teresa	Listening Amelia, Angélica, José Miguel, Libia, M.Paola, Santi, Teresa	Listening José Miguel, Libia		Restore Peace Angélica, Lucia, Jacinto, Romina	Not applicable Angélica, Gustavo, Sandra Santi
	Estrangement/incomprehension Jacinto, Amelia	Speaking Aurelio, Beatriz, Carola, Gustavo, Iris, Laura, Lucia, Pedro, Romina, Roxy, Sandra	Speaking Anita, Clarice, Gustavo, Laura, Romina	Participation Aurelio, Carola, Gustavo, Roxy, Teresa	Understanding all M. Paola, Victorie	
	Curiosity Carola, J. Miguel, Iris, Vctorie		Listening/ Speaking Aurelio, Amelia, Beatriz, Carola, Fabricio, Iris,Lucia, M. Paola, , Pedro Roxy, Victorie		Rejecting all Amelia, Anita, Beatriz, Fabricio, Iris, Santi	No problem Teresa
OTHERS	Anger Gustavo		Denounce Cristiana, Sandra	Mediate Anita, Beatriz, Clarice, Cristiana, Laura, Pedro, Romina	Against transgressor Gustavo, José Miguel, Laura	
		Ask for clarification Clarice, Cristiana, Fabricio, Jacinto	Warning Angélica, Libia, Santi	Waiting for regret Sandra	Denounce/confession Cristiana, Sandra, Teresa	
					Others acted wrongly Clarice, Roxy	
					Listen to Cristian Aurelio, Libia	

Table 4

Position regarding the situation	Participants	Narrative		Trajectory of experience	Theme of situation	Self evaluation.	Position regarding the report.
		Type	Person				
Genuine participants	ROXY	A	1st	1	Use of the telephone	OK	
	LAURA	A	1st	1		OK	
Shift genuine/spectator	CAROLA	A	3rd	1		Coward/OK	
	GUSTAVO	b	3rd	1		Not applicable	Ironic
Externally controlled. Denounce/confession	Sandra	B	3rd	2		Not applicable	
	Cristiana	C	1st	2		Coward	
Genuinely aroused: guilt for not contributing in restoring peace	Beatriz	A	1st	3		Coward	Perfunctory
	Anita	A	3rd	3		Coward	
	Romina	A	3rd	3		Incorrect	
	Clarice	A	1st	3		Rejects neutrality	Direct address
Inhibition for peace	Lucía	B	3rd	4a		OK	
	Amelia	A	1st	4a		OK	
Irresolutes with moral remorse and excuse	Lubia	A	1st	4a	ethnic quarrel	Coward	Negotiation to save face
	Fabricio	C	3rd	4b		Coward	
	Jacinto	B	3rd	4b		Incorrect.	
	Victorie	A	1st	4b		OK Discreet	
Spectators morally positioned but personally uncommitted	M. Paola	C	1st	4a		Incorrect	
	Iris	B	3rd	4a		Incorrect	
	Teresa	b	3rd	4a		Too bad for others	
<i>Provocateur mediator</i>	PEDRO	C	1st	3	Experiment	Paternalistic	Embarrassment
<i>Provocateur cynical</i>	AURELIO	C	3rd	1		Incorrect/coherent	Pretense
Spectators of the "experiment".	José M.	x	1st	4c		OK	Make clear they were aware of fake.
	Angélica	x	1st	4c		Not applicable	
	Santi	x	1st	4c		Not applicable	

Participants: Capital letters: active participation in the discussion. Bold letters: aware of the situation at some point in the discussion (see figure 1).