

*Sound, Knowledge,
and the Politics of Listening*

ALEJANDRO L. MADRID

THE ARCHIVE
and the
AURAL CITY



The Archive
and the
Aural City

BUY



Sign, Storage, Transmission

A series edited by JONATHAN STERNE AND LISA GITELMAN

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

The Archive and the Aural City

Sound,
Knowledge,
and the
Politics of
Listening

ALEJANDRO L.
MADRID

DUKE

Duke University Press *Durham and London* 2025

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

© 2025 DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project Editor: Livia Tenzer

Designed by Matthew Tauch

Typeset in Arno Pro and Quadraat Sans by

Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Madrid, Alejandro L. author

Title: The archive and the aural city : sound, knowledge, and the politics of listening / Alejandro L. Madrid.

Other titles: Sign, storage, transmission

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2025. | Series:

Sign, storage, transmission | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025004911 (print)

LCCN 2025004912 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478032113 paperback

ISBN 9781478028864 hardcover

ISBN 9781478061083 ebook

ISBN 9781478094425 ebook other

Subjects: LCSH: Music—Mexico—Archival resources | Music—

Latin America—Archival resources | Music—Political aspects—

Mexico | Music—Political aspects—Latin America | Sound

recordings in ethnology—Mexico | Sound recordings in

ethnology—Latin America | Sound archives—Mexico—History |

Sound archives—Latin America—History

Classification: LCC ML210.9 .M337 2025 (print) | LCC ML210.9

(ebook) | DDC 780.74—dc23/eng/20250603

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025004911>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025004912>

Cover art: Claudia Padilla Peña, *Inspiración* # 3. Used by permission of Claudia Padilla Peña.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

To Ekaterina and Marina, my reasons

In loving memory of Jonathan Sterne, to
whom this book owes so much

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

This page intentionally left blank

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

*Quic oc tlamati noyollo:
nic caqui in cuicatl,
nic itta in xochitl.
Maca in cuetlahuia in tlalticpac!*

Finally, my heart understands:
I hear a chant,
I contemplate a flower.
I hope they won't wither!
—Nezahualcoyotl

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

This page intentionally left blank

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Contents

List of Illustrations xi

List of Abbreviations xv

Acknowledgments xvii

Introduction. Questions About the Circulation of
Knowledge at the Sonic Turn 1

1. Performative Listening, Writing, Reading,
and the Assemblage of Archival Constellations 29

2. Patrimony, Objectification, and Representation
at Mexico's Fonoteca Nacional 57

3. *Critical Constellations of the Audio-Machine in
Mexico* and the Performativity of Archiving/Archival Labor 85

4. Things, Sound Objects, and Legacy at the Berliner
Phonogramm-Archiv's Konrad T. Preuss Collection 117

5. Mexican Rarities, *Disco pirata*, and the Promise
of a Sound Archive of Postnational Memory 161

6. Aurality, Materiality, and the Carrillo Pianos as Archives 191

7. In Search of the Aural City: Collective Action
and the Invisible Sound Archive 227

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Epilogue. The Relevance of Archives in Times of Post-Truth:
An Essay Against Nihilism in the Neoliberal Age 270

Notes 285

Bibliography 315

Index 341

DUKE

x Contents

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Illustrations

- 1.1 Album cover of *A Program of Mexican Music* (1941). 31
- 1.2 Drawings showing the measurements of two teponaztlis. 46
- 1.3 Castañeda and Mendoza's acoustic theory of the teponaztli. 46
- 1.4 Transduction: inscription of sound through light with the vitaphone. 52
- 2.1 Official iconography of the project México Suena Así. 65
- 2.2 Screenshot of the México Suena Así website map. 66
- 2.3 CD covers for *Paisaje sonoro de Veracruz* (2009) and *Paisaje sonoro de San Luis Potosí* (2009). 67
- 2.4 Official iconography advertising the Pueblos Mágicos program. 76
- 2.5 Official map of Pueblos Mágicos. 76
- 3.1 Program of the *Critical Constellations of the Audio-Machine in Mexico* (CCAMM) exhibit in Berlin. 89
- 3.2 Flyer for *Constelaciones críticas de la audiomáquina*. 94
- 3.3 Preparing the CCAMM exhibit in Berlin. 97
- 3.4 Félix Blume's *Memoria del hierro*. 108
- 3.5 Map of the CCAMM exhibit in Berlin. 109

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

- 3.6 Use of space at the CCAMM exhibit in Cuernavaca. 112
- 3.7 Picture from Félix Blume's series *Mientras escucho*. 115
- 4.1 A group of musicians from the Orquesta Experimental de Instrumentos Nativos. 119
- 4.2 Protesters outside of the Humboldt Forum. 120
- 4.3 Part of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv exhibit featured at the Humboldt Forum. 121
- 4.4 Galvano copies from the Preuss Collection. 135
- 4.5 The Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv as Memory of the World. 138
- 4.6 *Walzenaufnahmen der Cora und Huichol aus Mexiko 1905–1907/Grabaciones en cilindros de cera de los coras y los huicholes de México* (2013). 144
- 4.7 *La expedición al Nayarit* (2020). 145
- 5.1 Screenshot of the home page of the Mexican Rarities website. 169
- 5.2 Partial views of the Mexican Rarities physical archive. 177
- 5.3 Félix Blume, *Disco pirata* (2016). 183
- 6.1 Plan of the upright third-tone Carrillo Piano. 198
- 6.2 Third-tone Carrillo Piano made by Federico Buschmann. 199
- 6.3 Plan of the sixteenth-tone Carrillo Piano. 201
- 6.4 The Carrillo Pianos at Expo 58 in Brussels. 202
- 6.5 Poster for the Palais des Beaux-Arts concert. 204
- 6.6 Cover of the booklet for the Carrillo Pianos 1959 exhibit in Mexico City. 207
- 6.7 Julián Carrillo, *Balbuces* (1958), for sixteenth-tone piano and orchestra, mm. 1–15. 213

- 6.8 Julián Carrillo, *Estudios* (1959), for fifth-tone piano, mm. 1–14. 215
- 6.9 Juan Felipe Waller, *Lhorong*, 31°N 96°E (2011–15), mm. 73–90. 218
- 6.10 Carl Sauter Pianofabrik's information about the sixteenth-tone Carrillo Piano. 222
- 6.11 “Los Estragos del Sonido 13.” Newspaper cartoon of Julián Carrillo destroying a piano. 226
- 7.1 Image accompanying *Híbridas y Quimeras' Compilame'sta* (2019). 241
- 7.2 Screenshot of the RAM “Manifestx” as archived on the collective's website. 244
- 7.3 Screenshot of the home page of MUSEXPAT's website. 246
- 7.4 Screenshot of the home page of the *Islas Resonantes* archive website. 248
- 7.5 Screenshot of the home page of the *Bulla* archive website. 249
- 7.6 Screenshot of the home page of the Rancho Electrónico website. 252
- 7.7 Screenshot of the home page of the PoéticaSonoraMX website. 257
- 7.8 and 7.9 Radial and rhizomatic visualizations of a partial network of the Mexican Aural City as rendered visible in the archive(s) articulated in this chapter. 268–69

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

This page intentionally left blank

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Abbreviations

ABRDP	Acta betreffend die Reise des Dr. Preuss nach Amerika vom 17 August 1905 bis 22 August 1913
AMNH	American Museum of Natural History
BPA	Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CCAMM	<i>Critical Constellations of the Audio-Machine in Mexico</i>
CCWAHF	Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum
CENART	Centro Nacional de las Artes
CEOS	Centro Experimental Oído Salvaje
CNM	Conservatorio Nacional de Música
EDM	electronic dance music
ENAH	Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia
ET	equal temperament
EVO	Expo Vinylo Oaxaca
FAFL-UNAM	Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM
FAM-UNAM	Facultad de Música, UNAM
FONAPAS	Fondo Nacional para Actividades Sociales
GDR	German Democratic Republic

GEXLAT	Generx Experimentación Latinoamérica
INAH	Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia
INALI	Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas
INBA	Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes
KMV	Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art
MUAC	Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo
MUC	Museo Universitario del Chopo
MUSEXPLAT	Música Experimental Latinoamericana
NPR	National Public Radio
OEIN	Orquesta Experimental de Instrumentos Nativos
OFFAL	Orchestra for Females and Laptops
RAM	Redes Autónomas de Memoria
RDA	Repositorio Digital en Audio
RPM	revolutions per minute
12-TET	twelve-tone equal temperament
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

DUKE

Acknowledgments

This book was in the making for longer than ten years. That period has afforded me time to think, question my ideas, and rethink my conclusions many times. It has also allowed me to cross paths and share my work with many scholars whose work I admire and whose opinions I highly respect. Needless to say, the concepts in the final book bear little resemblance to the ideas I had when I started writing it, and much of that is due to the many illuminating conversations I have had the privilege to partake in with these colleagues. In 2013 I was invited to offer one of the first graduate seminars in sound studies taught in Mexico, at the then Escuela Nacional de Música of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. My conversations with the students and colleagues attending that seminar, as well as a class visit to the Fonoteca Nacional, were crucial in establishing the foundation for the development of this project. I am grateful to Roberto Kolb Neuhaus for the invitation and to Gonzalo Camacho, Marcela García López, William Herrera, Rossana Lara Velázquez, Lénica Reyes, Omar Soriano, and Cristina Tamariz for the rich discussions that made this class a memorable experience. Special thanks to Omar Soriano for creating the Sound Studies Mexico Facebook group, which allowed for the conversations started in the seminar to continue in the virtual world. I would also like to thank the staff at the Fonoteca Nacional for welcoming me and my students, and to Francisco “Tito” Rivas and Perla Olivia Rodríguez Reséndiz for candidly talking to me about their work at that institution.

On October 25, 2014, I hosted Mapping Sound and Urban Space in the Americas, a daylong conference at Cornell University that offered an ideal space for a meeting of sound scholars and sound artists. Thanks to Steve Pond and Chris Riley for making the event happen, and thanks to Kemi Adeyemi, Marcelo Armani, Leonardo Cardoso, Nina Eidsheim, José Luis Fernández, Josh Kun, Rossana Lara Velázquez, Tom McEnaney, Ramón

D

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Rivera-Servera, Luz María Sánchez, Jennifer Stoeber, and Alexandra Vazquez for the invaluable exchange of ideas, as well as my former Cornell colleagues, María Fernández and Karen Jaime, for moderating the sessions.

The Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign invited me to present a preliminary lecture on my work about the Fonoteca Nacional's soundscapes project in March 2016. I am thankful to Susan Koshy, Mike Silvers, Gabriel Solis, Jessica Hajek, and Roman Friedman for their encouraging comments, and to Marc Adam Hertzman for his insightful response to my talk. I also presented that lecture at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin's Butler School of Music, the Facultad de Artes at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago de Chile, and the Music Department at Brown University. Thanks to Luis Achondo and the ethnomusicology graduate students at Brown University for the invitation to present my research at their musicology colloquium. At UT Austin, I would like to thank Carlos Dávalos and the Association of Graduate Ethnomusicology and Musicology Students for organizing the event, as well as Robin Moore, Veit Erlmann, and their students for their warm reception. I want to express my gratitude to Daniel Party for sponsoring my visit to the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, as well as to the colleagues who contributed to the conversation after I presented this talk; among them, Juan Pablo González, Laura Jordán, Miguel Angel Marín, Juan Francisco Sans, Rodrigo Torres, Mauricio Valdebenito, and Alejandro Vera.

On February 25, 2020, I presented a lecture entitled "The Politics of Distinction and Representation in the Aural Turn: Who Gets to Listen in the 'Sounded' City?" It was my last live talk before the long hiatus forced on us by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the keynote presentation of the symposium Transnational Literary and Sonic Culture across the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula, organized by Duke University's Romance Studies Department. I am grateful to Elia Romera Figueroa, Silvia Serrano, and Marcelo Noah for the invitation and to Silvia Bermúdez, Alejandra Bronfman, David Garcia, and Tom McEnaney for the illuminating conversation.

I would like to thank Elisabeth Le Guin, Farrah O'Shea, and Pheaross Graham for the invitation to participate in the panel "Methods of Analysis in Music Performance Studies" as part of the conference Music and Performance Studies Today at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Their invitation was the perfect excuse to return to a research project that had been dormant for several years. Thanks to the panelists, Amy Bauer, Roshanak Kheshti, and Richard Pettengill, for their comments and

suggestions, as well as Mitchell Morris for his thought-provoking response to the panel. “Making an Archive and Listening to It: The Performativity of Archiving/Archival Labor,” an early version of chapter 3 in this book and a revised version of the UCLA lecture, was subsequently presented at the Conférences de Prestige Series of the Université de Montréal’s Faculté de Musique and Cornell University’s Department of Romance Studies. At the Université de Montréal, I want to thank Jonathan Goldman for the invitation and Jean-Jacques Nattiez for engaging with my ideas. At Cornell University, I am indebted to Edmundo Paz Soldán for the invitation and to the students and colleagues who participated in the intense and in-depth discussion that ensued after the presentation, especially Irina Troconis, Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri, Edmundo Paz Soldán, Re’ee Hagay, Dani Hawkins, Alex Nik Pasqualini, Brian Sengdala, Mark Mahoney, and Thomas Cressy. Another version of chapter 3 was also presented as a research lecture at Harvard University’s Department of Music. I am particularly grateful to Anne Shreffler, Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Davindar Singh, and Richard Wolf for their insightful comments, questions, and suggestions.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Miguel Olmos Aguilera for inviting me to present my research about Mexico’s Fonoteca Nacional as the keynote lecture for the Coloquio Paisaje Sonoro, Música, Ruidos y Sonidos de las Fronteras at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte-Tijuana. This was a rare, unusual, and very welcome opportunity to share my work with Mexican colleagues. Thanks to Gonzalo Camacho, Igaël González, and Xilonen Luna as well as the other conference participants for their questions and comments. I am also deeply thankful to Esteban Buch and Vera Wolkowicz for inviting me to present my research about the Preuss Collection as the keynote lecture for the Conference Musique, Politiques Culturelles et Identités: Rencontres Transatlantiques entre la Musique et les Musiciens d’Europe et d’Amérique Latine at L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France. I am particularly indebted to Andrés Amado, Jacky Avila, Gisela Cánepa Koch, Heidi Feldman, Daniela Fugellie, Lucía Patiño Mayer, Walther Maradiegue, Violeta Nigro Giunta, Raúl Renato Romero, Belén Vega Pichaco, and Alejandro Vera for the elucidating conversations at this conference.

Thanks to Teresa Cascudo for the invitation to present a paper that would become the core of chapter 1 as the inaugural lecture of the Seminario Permanente de Historiografía of the Doctorado Interdisciplinario hosted by the Universidad de La Rioja, Universidad de Valladolid, and Universidad

Complutense de Madrid. A revised version of this presentation was delivered at the Irna Priore Music and Culture Lecture Series of the University of North Carolina Greensboro. My gratitude to Joan Titus for the invitation and to her colleagues, especially David Aarons, Lorena Guillén, and Elizabeth Keathley, as well as their students, for their questions and comments.

My deep appreciation goes to Sydney Hutchinson and Stefanie Alisch for inviting me to present my research about the Carrillo Pianos at the 54th BEAM Meeting: Berlin Ethnomusicology and the Anthropology of Music Research Group, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Thanks to Barbara Alge and Julio Mendivil for inviting me to present my research about the Preuss Collection at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main and the Universität Wien respectively. In Frankfurt, I am also indebted to Christina Richter-Ibáñez and Lisa-Maria Brusius, and in Vienna to Juan Bermúdez, Natalia Neira Nieto, and Martin Ringsmut, for their comments and suggestions.

I presented early drafts of chapter 6 at the quinquennial conference of the International Musicological Society (IMS) in Athens in August 2022 and the joint meeting of the American Musicological Society (AMS), the Society for Music Theory (SMT), and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) in New Orleans in November 2022. I truly appreciate the comments and feedback from the participants in those panels, especially Ana Alonso-Minutti (chair), Julin Lee, Ayako Kosaka, and Sebastián Zubieta in Athens; and Theodore Gordon (chair), Laura Tunbridge, and Annie Garlid in New Orleans. I also presented an abbreviated version of chapter 4 at the 2023 meetings of the SEM in Ottawa, Canada, and the AMS in Denver. I truly appreciate the feedback from the panelists, especially Judith Klassen (chair), Beatriz Goubert, and Edwin Porras in Ottawa; and Sergio Ospina-Romero (chair, panel organizer, and participant) and Melissa Camp in Denver.

At the Centro Julián Carrillo in San Luis Potosí, I am particularly thankful to Iván Sánchez Martínez and Alejandra Sánchez for processing and providing images of the design plans for the Carrillo Pianos. I am especially grateful to Eduardo Morones Hernández for granting me access to the unpublished research on these instruments written by his late brother, Mario Morones Hernández. I also wish to take a moment to thank Carmen Carrillo de Viramontes and the Carrillo family for their continuous support of my research about Julián Carrillo.

Special thanks to my graduate students at Cornell University, Rachel Horner, Cibele Moura, and Rafael Torralvo, for bouncing back ideas with

me during the sessions of a seminar called Politics, Utopia, and Noise in the Sound Archive, which I taught in spring 2022. I am particularly grateful to María Edurne Zuazu and Valzhyna Mort for visiting the class and providing wonderful opportunities to discuss their work about sound art and poetry, respectively, in relation to our own ideas about archives. Likewise, I am grateful to my graduate students at Harvard University, Alyssa Cottle, Ben Gregson, Luis Pabón Rico, María Alejandra Privado, Eloy Ramirez, Shiva Ramkumar, Lucas Reccitelli, and Sunday Ukaewen, for the insightful and equally delightful conversations during a later version of the same seminar, in which they all read and commented on the complete first draft of this book.

Many other individual friends and colleagues contributed to this book in countless manners, including discussing my ideas, sharing their work with me, or pointing me toward specific scholarly and artistic networks. To all of them I owe a great debt of gratitude. They include Lizette Alegre González, Chelsea Burns, Brigid Cohen, Rodrigo de la Mora Pérez Arce, Pablo Dodero Carrillo, Ana Lidia Domínguez, Jorge David García, Veit Erlmann, Susana González Aktories, Glenda Goodman, Carlos Hernández, Travis Johns, Ana Mora Flores, Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri, Benjamin Piekut, Ekaterina Pirozhenko, Pepe Rojo, Silvia Spitta, Gary Tomlinson, Paulina Velázquez, and Daniel Walden. I am especially grateful to friends and colleagues who have provided generous and detailed comments and feedback on specific chapters of the book at various stages; they include Ana Alonso-Minutti, Andrea Ancira, Kjetil Klette Böhler, Thomas Cressy, Eric Johns, Rossana Lara Velázquez, Tamara Levitz, Julio MENDÍVIL, Sergio Ospina-Romero, Carlos Prieto Acevedo, Jesús Ramos-Kittrell, Emilio Ros-Fábregas, Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Margarita Valdovinos, Juan Fernando Velásquez, and María Edurne Zuazu. I remind the reader that I am solely responsible for any errors and oversights throughout the book.

Writing letters of recommendation is always an onerous task, especially when the requests arrive at particularly busy moments of the academic year. I am extremely grateful to Suzanne Cusick, Josh Kun, Carol Oja, and Jonathan Sterne for writing letters on my behalf through the process of applying for grants and funding to complete this project. Also, many thanks to my former Cornell colleagues Andrew Hicks, Simone Pinet, and David Yearsley for sharing their insights about successfully applying for a variety of sought-after yearlong fellowships.

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of the Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. A Guggenheim

Fellowship granted me the privilege of dedicating a whole year to nothing but doing research in Berlin and writing the first draft of this book. In Berlin, my deep appreciation goes to Maurice Mengel, Sydney Hutchinson, and Albrecht Wiedmann for facilitating my research at the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv. Thanks to Manuela Fischer at the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, for giving me prompt access to all the documents and materials about Konrad T. Preuss that I requested. I am uniquely indebted to Dörte Schmidt and Norbert Palz for their support in securing a postdoctoral visiting appointment at the Universität der Künste Berlin, which made my yearlong stay in Berlin possible. At the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, I am very grateful to Barbara Göbel and the institute's efficient and accommodating library staff. I was very fortunate that early during my stay in Berlin, the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut sponsored the workshop *Medialidades de la Convivialidad: Archivos, Registros Sonoros y Nuevas Dinámicas de Acceso y Circulación*. This symposium allowed me to informally participate in enlightening conversations about sound archives with experts such as Miguel A. García, Matthias Lewy, Bernd Brabec de Mori, Gisela Cánepa Koch, Walther Maradiegue, and Rita Eloranta. Toward the end of the writing and publication process, the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung honored me with a coveted Humboldt-Forschungspreis (Humboldt Research Award) for this book project. I am deeply thankful to Sebastian Klotz and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin for putting forward the nomination and supporting it. I would also like to thank Paul Fleming and Elke Siegel for their friendship and for allowing me and my family to stay in their fabulously vintage and cozy Berlin apartment for almost a year.

At Duke University Press, I am grateful to Jonathan Sterne and Lisa Gitelman, coeditors of the *Sign, Storage, Transmission* series; to Ken Wissoker, senior executive editor, and his assistant, Kate Mullen, for their support and sincere interest in this project; and to Livia Tenzer for her exceptional work as project editor of this book. I am also genuinely indebted to the anonymous reviewers who read and commented on the first draft of this book's manuscript very generously and in great detail. Their suggestions were essential for rethinking, revising, and tightening the final version of the book.

I am very fortunate to have serendipitously found the perfect artwork for the cover of this book in the work of my dear friend, the superb Mexican artist Claudia Padilla Peña. Thanks to her for permission to use *Inspiración 3* on the cover of this book. I am deeply honored.

This book is available in an Open Access edition thanks to funding from Harvard University's Publication Grant Office, Harvard's Department of Music, and a publication subvention from the General Fund and the Iberian and Latin American Fund of the American Musicological Society, supported in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

This page intentionally left blank

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Introduction: Questions About the Circulation of Knowledge at the Sonic Turn

I suppose an archive gives you a kind of valley
in which your thoughts can bounce back to you, transformed.
You whisper intuitions and thoughts into the emptiness,
hoping to hear something back.
—Valeria Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* (2019)

As a scholar, a question I often get when presenting my research is “What is your archive?” The question seldom refers to any physical repository safeguarding documents or materials, and my response rarely mentions those kinds of archival ventures. Instead, my answer usually highlights the collections of materials, embodied practices, archival constellations, and overall performance complexes that one gathers or concocts when working on a particular project but that are very rarely confined to the boundaries of one specific repository. Terry Cook conceptualizes the difference between these two formations by using the terms *archive* versus *archive(s)*. He argues that scholars engage an archive as a “metaphorical symbol, as a representation of identity, or as the recorded memory production of some person or group or culture,” while *archive(s)* refers to the “history of the archive, from [its] initial creation or inscription to its appearance in the archival reference room, [and] the internal concepts and processes that animate actual archivists working inside real archives . . . , or of the

D

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

distinct body of professional ideas and practices those archivists follow, or of the impact all this has on shaping both the surviving record and historical knowledge.”¹ Cook’s explanation does not simply differentiate between the archive as a scholarly formation and the archive(s) as a physical repository that is also legible as an embodiment of the histories and epistemes that provide it with cultural capital; by addressing the history behind the physical creation of a particular archival space, he alludes to labor as one of the most significant considerations in understanding the differences between these two types of archival entities. Achille Mbembe has also written about archives in the plural to refer to “a building, symbol of a public institution [as well as] a collection of documents . . . kept in this building,” highlighting the labor involved in “convert[ing] a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place, where they can be consulted according to well-established procedures and regulations.”² Both Cook’s and Mbembe’s descriptions of the archive and the archive(s) take place within a larger interrogation of their apparent transparency. On the one hand, this critique is aimed at finding out how scholars mediate the information kept in these archives as they use it to support and develop larger narratives. On the other, it is also about rendering visible how, by appraising, selecting, curating, encoding, and classifying records, and by developing databases and implementing retrieval strategies, the archivist determines “what the future will know about its past: who will have a continuing voice and who will be silenced.”³ Labor in both cases—in the archiving and the retrieving, in the constitution of the archive’s materiality and in the construction of a narrative spell based on the documents it stores—is the powerful performative agent that transforms documents into systems of information and normativity.

The Archive and the Aural City articulates both the archive and the archive(s) and pays special attention to the kinds of labor required for their construction as material and epistemic entities. Throughout this book, I work with a general assumption that archives are collections of objects or documents that allow for the development of certain interpretations of reality or the performance of reality. Rather than ascribing any type of ontological meaning to the documents archives preserve, I take as my point of departure that such materials acquire meaning only relationally and in tandem with the agency and labor of the individuals who engage them. However, I propose that archives also have a certain agency derived from their own design and their status as disciplining and validating institutions. This

archival agency often guides how individuals engage with them and understand the documents stored within them. Thus, I see archives as systems that make information legible based on particular epistemic placeholders that, as Gary Tomlinson states, “can create specific systems of information that give rise to their own internal developmental tendencies and vectors, depending on the cognitive, bodily, and environmental constraints they involve.”⁴ In that sense, archives are often closed or circular systems; they are meant to reproduce themselves and the epistemic placeholders that keep them together. Within this paradigm, one may understand a wide variety of cultural practices as archives.

Memes, those fair-use remixed image-icons that circulate abundantly over the internet, are very good examples of this dynamic. They work because they refer to widely shared epistemic placeholders, including ideas about teleology, essentialism, identity, complexity, and so on. Thus, one could also consider memes as archives of the values that justify those epistemic placeholders. It is precisely the circular character of the meme as a cultural practice—the way in which they are validated by but also revalidate the values that make them work—that makes it a straightforward example of one of the quintessential paradoxes of archives: the gathering and classifying of information that continues to reproduce these epistemic placeholders; in turn, these conventions prevent the production of alternative and potentially more innovative forms of knowledge. Are these placeholders the seed of the self-destruction of the archive and the archive(s) or of the dissolution of the logic that makes them useful within specific paradigms of knowledge production? Cristina Rivera Garza argues in favor of this conceptualization when she states that “with its materiality on its back, the archive frequently obstructs the linear activity of the narration, making its development problematic, raising questions that are precisely those of its own production.”⁵ By focusing on the way in which the archive(s)’ materiality and its history tarnish the way in which the very narrative it is supposed to validate is produced, Rivera Garza seems to take aim at the archive(s)’ circular logic and to infer that the key for its deconstruction lies within itself and the labor that makes it possible.

In consonance with Rivera Garza’s “anarchival” dictum, the central goal of this book is to find out and explore ways to open those closed or circular systems in order to make the documents they store and the information they generate legible in productive ways that transcend the circularity of its epistemic dynamics.⁶ In other words, this book focuses on how, as Kirsten

Weld proposes in the case of Guatemalan secret police archives, records produced for social control can be repurposed as “tools of social reckoning,” and how “what matters most about such archives is not their supposedly depersonalized, abstract exercise of panoptical control but rather their use-value by real humans.”⁷ This book launches this exploration in the context of archives that store sound and the particular types of mediation that inform the production and circulation of knowledge in and about Mexico and Latin America at the sonic turn in the humanities and social sciences. I also argue that this sonic turn has motivated the development of an Aural City (*Ciudad Aural*), an urban intellectual elite that seeks to re-evaluate prevalent visuo-centric and logocentric ideas about understanding and representing the world from a locus provided by sound and listening as a type of epistemic labor. Thus, *The Archive and the Aural City* sits at the intersection of archives, archival labor, and aurality to question the viability of an epistemic project that, by attending to the power of listening to perform and sound alternative types of knowledge, may be able to bypass the epistemic and political shortcomings of what Ángel Rama termed the Lettered City (*Ciudad Letrada*).⁸

The development of new sound recording technologies at the end of the nineteenth century revolutionized musicological and ethnographic research and the possibilities of documenting, storing, copying, and circulating music, speech, and sound. The establishment of the first sound archives soon after slowly allowed for an unprecedented access to musical practices from around the globe and the development of new forms of knowledge in relation to and framed by nation- and empire-building projects. A new type of relation between sonic practices and listening individuals began to develop out of the schizophonic mediations that modern sound objects—such as the wax cylinder—entailed.⁹ Based on the notion that archives are never stable nor complete and that they only speak through practices of interaction, this book interrogates the work of traditional sound archives but also contributes to expanding the notion of what a sound archive could be and do.

The Archival Turn

Historians have a methodologically critical relationship with the evidence they find in the archives. As Martin Johnes explains, historians always “read between the lines, . . . examine the way a source says things and consider its relationship to wider social, cultural and political contexts.”¹⁰

Nonetheless, the interrogation of the archive initiated by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s through the mid-1990s brought about a radical reconceptualization of the archive that had profound consequences, not only for and among historians, but also for the humanities and social sciences more generally. This move is central to the unfolding of what scholars in a wide variety of disciplines have termed the *archival turn*.¹¹ In his critique of structuralism, a philosophical system that neglects historical events in an effort to highlight the presumed structures, patterns, and dynamics underlying all of human activity, Foucault suggested that although “history has no ‘meaning’ . . . it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail—but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies, and tactics.”¹² Indeed, for him, rather than emphasizing the symbolic field or any signifying structure, critical inquiry should focus on the power relations that authenticate and render specific regimes of knowledge meaningful. As such, the archive(s) as an institution that aspires to a timeless totality is actually a reflection of the power relations that shape the regimes of knowledge that the archives aim to represent, become an icon of, and, in its attempt to render time immobile, end up reproducing.

In his continuation of this critique, Derrida also understands the archive as a place of violence. However, rather than focusing on it as an epistemic practice, he takes into account the materiality of the archives, stating that “there is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition and without a certain exteriority,” to contend that “the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.”¹³ For Derrida, the performative logic of repetition that provides the archive with its aura of memory bank and authenticity is intrinsically connected to the compulsive repetition in Sigmund Freud’s death drive and thus to a sense of inevitable self-annihilation. Thus, the desire for origins that drives many into the archive(s) leads to a type of fetishization of its space, its holdings, and its sense of timeless transcendence that renders it discursively unproductive and invites oblivion rather than memory.

More than a challenge to the faith in the factual positivity of the materials held in archives, the radical character of Foucault’s and Derrida’s theoretical interventions lies in their questioning of the assumed stability of archives and the discursive regimes that archival labor engenders. It is in that sense that their ideas came to disrupt the work of traditional historians

and their narrative assertions. This archival turn, the understanding of the archive and archive(s) as systems of rules and epistemic placeholders that inconspicuously regulate what one can and cannot say, has led historians to reflect on the discursive implications of their archival labor more consistently and systematically. If the archive and archive(s) tended to be phantasmatic presences in the work of historians, as Martin Johnes has argued, the archival turn not only rendered them visible but also placed them at the center of these scholars' intellectual conversations and made them subjects of study themselves.¹⁴

Through the first two decades of the twenty-first century, this reconceptualization of the archive and the archive(s) has gained traction in a wide variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, making them into influential concepts and analytical tools. In this trans-disciplinary reincarnation, the archive and the archive(s) have taken on broader meanings. This has made them focal points for innovative explorations of identity, belonging, memory, tradition, communication, regulation, subjectivity, borders, and so on, in many historical and cultural settings, from colonial encounters, nation-building efforts, and canonic formations to political protests, the curation of art exhibits, and the performance of expressive culture. Thus, besides their character as institutions, repositories, collections, storage spaces, information networks, and constellations, the archive and the archive(s) have also become metaphors to talk about the production, transmission, and circulation of knowledge within larger power dynamics in a wide variety of texts, practices, plots, scenarios, and objects.¹⁵

The Archive and the Aural City embraces both, the reconceptualization of the archive and archive(s) as well as the challenge to understand other cultural, material, and virtual formations as archives. Here, the archive works as an episteme and as a metaphor that, as Daniel Marshall and Zeb Tortorici allege, allows "material[s to get] turned into something else: evidence or loss, history or an inspiration to do history differently."¹⁶ Highlighting this performativity of the archive and the archival labor behind its production and usage, the case studies in this book explore internet networks, musical instruments, museum exhibits, and books and the performance complexes around them, as well as institutional and alternative repositories, as material, epistemic, and metaphoric archives.

Coming back to the issue about defining one's archive with which I opened this introductory chapter may be a productive way to clarify the

concerns that first got me interested in interrogating sound archives. For that matter, I reformulate the original question: What does it mean to ask someone what their archive is? What does it mean for someone to define their archive? The most normative answer to these questions would focus on outlining the borders, walls, or limits of an archive or archival project. This concern revolves around the possible identity of the archival formation we seek to study but also around the characteristics that bound together the materials and documents we seek to analyze and those we choose to exclude from that exploration. Like any other project about walls and borders, as much as this is an effort to preserve, protect, and shape certain ideas and knowledges, it is also, and foremost, a mechanism of control or, at the very least, a mechanism that creates the illusion of control. By enforcing what makes it in and what stays out of the archive, this mechanism and the gatekeepers in charge of it impose a certain sense of authority over the archives and their holdings. Once this dynamic is established, it is clear that defining an archive in such a way is all about control: control over the production of knowledge, affectivity, and order, or certain forms of order often assumed to be in the archive's nature. Nevertheless, rather than focusing on control and authority, a nonnormative answer to those questions may contemplate instead novel ways of emphasizing the agency of the documents and materials in the archive as objectifications of the power relations that make up the archive itself; such answer would also highlight how documentary ontologies are connected to these processes of objectification. That is, a nonnormative look at the archive would focus on "the capacity of documentary practices to make things come into being."¹⁷ Here, defining the archive would be about giving up control and introducing a sense of chaos that could eventually help us deconstruct the epistemic placeholders that make the archive legible along with ideological commands that it also helps reproduce. In that sense, defining the archive in a nonnormative way would be all about trying to find ways to discover *lo inaudito* in the archive.

In Spanish, the term *inaudito* has two connotations. It may refer to something that is exceptional or unprecedented, or, more literally, it may refer to something that has not been heard. In the context of the sound archive projects this book embarks on, this double entendre is particularly fertile. It shifts the focus from finding the expected to encountering the surprising, from listening to what is there to figuring out ways to listen to the unheard, whether because it has been silenced, because it has been left

out of the repository altogether, or because we have not learned how to listen to it or for it. For that reason, the central premise of this book is to find ways to access *lo inaudito*, to estrange the archive to listen to its contents from different perspectives and as part of new relational networks and constellations that make it reverberate in more productive ways, ways that transcend what its design and structure allow us to retrieve from it.

Doing archival work in Latin America is often a very different experience from doing archival work in the United States or Europe. While US and European institutions usually have the funding to preserve documents and materials and systematize access to them, the extreme financial precarity of many archival endeavors in Latin America determines a very different way of accessing documents and materials and retrieving information from these repositories. Early in my academic career I found it extremely frustrating to try to sort out my way through archives that not only could be uncataloged but also could be in such a state of chaos that sometimes finding what one was looking for could mean the discovery of holes in the archive, not only metaphorically but often quite literally: documents that were supposed to be there but were not because they may have been extracted from the archive or lost in the past, or documents whose inadequate preservation status made them impossible to handle without jeopardizing their very existence. Nevertheless, when some of these archives became institutionalized, organized, and systematically cataloged, I realized that there was something uniquely productive about figuring out how to locate and trace documents within the archive's former chaos that was lost with their institutionalization and regimentation. While the disciplining of those archives allowed for a more ordered, guided, and methodical transit through their holdings, their patrimonialization also presumed the privileging of certain documents and materials, the hiding of the archive's holes, and the advancing of certain narratives over others in the process of retrieving information. In other words, the organization and patrimonialization of these archives led to a certain restriction of their holdings' agency. The documents and materials were no longer able to point researchers toward the archive's silences and holes in the same way that figuring out paths through the chaos had allowed. In a way, the sense of exhilaration that I experienced when uncovering and hearing *lo inaudito* in those archives was lost when they became more efficient in guiding my navigation through their holdings in accordance to their specific predetermined placeholders. Thus, my exploration of strategies for the introduction of chaos, estrangement, and schizzes into archival systems in this book is informed

by a desire to recapture that sense of exhilaration in discovering—even generating—and listening to *lo inaudito* that archival systematization, in its logic of preserving things, keeping them from changing, and making them immobile, often renders superfluous.

The Sonic Turn, the Lettered City, and the Aural City

Sound studies emerged as an interdisciplinary field in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, advocating for a shift in scholarly focus beyond visuo-centrism that recognized the importance of sound and listening in everyday life and their potential as analytical categories. The field sought to pay serious attention to sound and aural culture to “enrich our understanding of perception and its role in situating oneself, forming beliefs, and acting upon the environment.”¹⁸ This scholarly shift in the humanities and social sciences has been termed the *sonic turn*. Tom McEnaney traces it back to the publication of Emily Thompson’s *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002) and Jonathan Sterne’s *The Audible Past* (2003). He explains that the work of these scholars defined the field of sound studies by placing

an emphasis on the detail of sound as an isolated object of study, but also sound as a more general principle of selection (rather than “music” or “speech”); a reorientation to denaturalize hearing and reconceive listening practices as historically contingent, material, and social techniques; the need for a media archaeology that links technology and technique without falling into “impact histories” or “media determinism.” [As such, the study of sound is not just about] a new object of research, but a new method that acknowledges the performative character of culture without concealing the felt reality of material life.¹⁹

Following on this, David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny suggest that listening and hearing someone is a matter of recognizing their subjectivity and consciousness, thus proposing that the sonic turn takes sound as “a substance of the world as well as a basic part of how people frame their knowledge about the world.”²⁰ The central place of listening in the sonic turn has led some to refer to it as a shift “where aurality becomes an epistemological issue located at the intersection between knowledge and power.”²¹ Indeed, sound studies is not just about sound, noises, or silences existing out there; it is about exploring how certain modes of listening help us make sense of those sounds, noises, and silences within specific cultural and historical

contexts as well as how those modes of listening lead to certain understandings of the world out there.

The arrival of the sonic turn in the humanities and social sciences speaks of cultures of sound and listening that respond to a democratization of culture that, as Jean Franco puts it, tells us of “the ‘invasion’ of the literary text by the ‘noise’ from outside [that] succeeded in breaching the walls of . . . the ‘lettered city.’”²² Therefore the unabashed critique of logocentrism at the base of sound studies could also be read as a further sign of the decline or decentering of the Lettered City. Such a trend is also connected to larger social and cultural processes in which technology revitalizes forms of knowledge production considered premodern, especially orality, aurality, and a detailed attention to sound. In this context, I propose the concept of the Aural City not just as a contemporary sonic and aural counterpart to the Lettered City but also as a window into critically addressing the way in which several important Mexican and Latin American artistic projects have uncritically celebrated the sonic turn as the locus for a more democratic construction of and access to knowledge. Like Rama’s Lettered City, the Aural City does not refer to any actual metropolis or urban center. Instead, the city stands as a metaphor for an urban intellectual elite; their relation to specific modes of producing, circulating, and accessing knowledge; and the political potential of that knowledge.

Civilizations have always been associated with specific cities. When we think about classic civilizations such as the Sumerians, the Greeks, the Toltecs, or the earliest Chinese dynasties, we immediately picture the majestic architecture of Uruk, Athens, Teotihuacán, or Chang’an Cheng. In the Western understanding of human history, urban centers and the states they have stood for have always been synonymous with civilization. Their architectural remains, which transcend the people who once inhabited and made them alive, are, in a way, archives of ancient lifestyles, belief systems, social arrangements, understandings of nature, and the like. Thus, the idea of the city has always been a crucial aspect in defining civilizing projects that take the civilization-barbarism dichotomy as their central tenet.²³ *Polis*, the Greek word for “city,” was originally coined to account for the city center encompassing administrative and religious institutions. Eventually, the term was used also to refer to the city’s body politics, the intellectual and political elites or groups of citizens that ruled these urban centers. Ángel Rama articulated these ideas when he coined the term *Lettered City* to describe a privileged yet amorphous, transhistorical, diverse, and multi-vocal Latin American urban elite that found in literary production and the

control of the written word a powerful tool of representation. For Rama, the Lettered City was a metaphor for this cultural elite and their use of written culture to access cultural capital, to shape and control a number of political and cultural projects throughout the history of the region, and to assist them in their attempt to render rhetorically silent and invisible the Indigenous civilizations they encountered and the epistemic worlds these civilizations entailed. In other words, the Lettered City could be defined as an intellectual elite, a logocentric episteme and its power structure, and the strategies used by that elite to reproduce such a structure.

In *La ciudad letrada* (1984), Rama explains how the urban design of colonial cities in the Americas allowed the Spanish conquistadors a utopian assertion of rationalized order that came to symbolize their assumed Eurocentric civilizing mission. As he puts it, “Isolated amid vast, alien, and hostile spaces, the cities nevertheless undertook first to ‘evangelize,’ and later to ‘educate’ their rural hinterlands.” To achieve this, the cities “had to dominate and impose certain norms on their savage surroundings. The first of these norms was an education centered on literacy.”²⁴ This task fell on a group of *letrados* (lettered or educated individuals) who oversaw the administrative operation of the mechanisms of political power, the ideologizing of Indigenous populations, and the education of the local ruling elite. This is the specialized social group that Rama called the Lettered City: the citizens in charge of dealing in and with the written word. According to Rama, the longevity of this intellectual elite and its lasting political influence in the region, from the sixteenth century through the twentieth century, can be explained by its ability to control the production and circulation of knowledge through the written word in a largely illiterate society. During this period, the Lettered City oversaw the solidification of European colonial rule as well as its eventual collapse, the development of republican nation-states, and the unfolding of nationalistic modernizing agendas symbolically validated in the incorporation, control, disciplining, and appropriation of vernacular culture. The variety and even contradictory nature of these political and cultural projects is a witness to the fact that the Lettered City has never been a monolithic formation. Instead, there have been many Lettered Cities, often coexisting in time, and always shaped in response to specific historical contingencies and in negotiation with local circumstances and the demands of privileged as well as subaltern actors. The historical membership of the Lettered City may also be debatable and open to discussion since social mobility and class struggles within specific local arrangements of personal and political

relations have always rendered its borders porous. Nevertheless, its modus operandi as a central entity mediating power dynamics and prompting the negotiation of hegemonic pacts throughout the history of Latin America is very clear.

Franco argues that the demise of the Lettered City came about because of the impact of the Cold War in Latin America and the resulting anti-communist repression and censorship of military dictatorships and civil governments alike in the 1970s and 1980s. The brutality of these regimes forced many writers and artists into exile and “ended [their] utopian dreams [as] agents of ‘salvation and redemption’ . . . leaving older structures, both cultural and political, in fragments. Terms such as ‘identity,’ ‘responsibility,’ ‘nation,’ ‘the future,’ ‘history’—even ‘Latin American’—had to be rethought.”²⁵ For Franco, the imposition of neoliberal policies in the region after the Cold War, through the 1990s, with their pragmatist approach to economic as well as cultural production, and the weakening of the nation-state as a sovereign political formation, marked the end of the Lettered City project. The advent of the internet and other forms of media that claimed a more democratized access to information, and a shift from civic participation to the consumption of commodities as the main agent in the production of citizenship, certainly challenged the relevance of a cultural project that sought to control individuals and their agency through regulating their access to information and certain types of knowledge and cultural capital. In the ideal neoliberal city, the role of consumption is to help the economic system “reproduce the labor force and increase profit on commodities.”²⁶ Indeed, in a social and economic arrangement that does not need civically committed citizens but instead requires avid consumers, controlling the circulation of the written word and knowledge seems secondary to generating desires and aspirations and regulating the renewal of consumption.

Just as I remain skeptical about the celebratory welcoming of sound studies as the answer to the epistemic excesses and shortcomings of logocentrism, I refuse to comply with the enthusiastic academic discourse about the demise of the Lettered City brought about by the sense of disillusionment described by Franco. Many scholars have argued against that.²⁷ I would also add that the civilizing mindset that transhistorically informs the Lettered City does not disappear with the avowed shift from logocentrism to aurality proposed by sound studies either. As the architectural remains and urban layout of Tenochtitlán remind us, a city does not just vanish when it is replaced by another city. Traces of Tenochtitlán lurk be-

neath and around the streets, corners, and buildings of Mexico City. When we learn to see and identify them, we gain a novel perspective that gives the newer city meaning well beyond the moment of its violent birth, the utopian dreams of those who founded it, and the labor of the Lettered City that has rhetorically made it part of a civilizing project for centuries. To borrow Carolyn Steedman's allegory, nothing disappears; it always leaves us its dust in the archive, which we must learn how to deal with.²⁸ Following on these metaphors, one of the goals of this book is to explore the epistemic connections and differences between the Lettered City and the Aural City as displayed in several sound archival projects. With that, I do not intend to claim that the Aural City has replaced the Lettered City; that would be a very reductionist interpretation. Instead, I argue that the Aural City represents a new intellectual episteme that characterizes the labor of an urban intellectual elite whose members sometimes, strategically, may travel back and forth between the Aural and the Lettered Cities. In other words, the Aural City and the Lettered City coexist, occasionally sharing spaces and intellectual concerns but often following diametrically opposed intellectual and political principles.

Rather than simply proposing the *Aural City* as a theoretical term, I intend to use it in an embodied way. I am interested in identifying and mapping out the labor and networks of specific individuals whose work with sound may qualify them as citizens of the Mexican Aural City. My way of going about it is twofold. On the one hand, I do it by looking at the archives these individuals or their networks may have crafted and left behind or by studying the ways in which they have engaged already existing archives. On the other hand, I do it by grouping together archival constellations that render visible networks that otherwise remain invisible or *inauditos* in the vastness of the infinite archive of the everyday, for which everything out there could eventually be an archival document. The possibility of collective grouping, of finding resonances and echoes in the archive, is a strategy to partially render visible portions of the Aural City and its labor in a more embodied way. The type of labor I seek to identify here could be depicted as creative, reterritorializing, institutional, or alternative; it could reproduce logocentric hegemony, challenge it, or flourish in the in-between cracks. However, rather than classifying individuals and their labor into discrete uncontaminated categories, I seek to show the many ways in which this labor escapes an essentialist characterization. It is precisely in the apparent contradictions of the projects that the citizens of the Aural City engage in that one can visualize the cultural and social

complexities that the term embodies as well as its descriptive potential vis-à-vis and beyond the structures of the Lettered City.

Geoffrey Baker has challenged Rama's emphasis on the written word and the *letrados*, arguing that "music, sound, and performance . . . were equally integral to [the] process of colonization and urbanization in the New World, with the ordering of the city . . . conceived and enacted not only in verbal but also in sonic terms."²⁹ He refers to this "intersection of sound, urban form, and colonial power" as a "*ciudad sonora*, or 'sonorous city.'"³⁰ Baker is correct in pointing that out as a critique of Rama's Lettered City. His work, along that of scholars such as Linda Curcio-Nagy, Jesús Ramos-Kittrell, Alejandro Vera, and Leonardo Waisman, provides plenty of evidence of the ways music was used to systematize social and urban life during the colonial period.³¹ Along Baker's lines, Natalia Bieletto-Bueno has proposed the notion of the *ciudad vibrante*, or Vibrating/Vibrant City, to study how "the listening modalities and strategies of the inhabitants of a particular city allow them to build specific relationships between sounds, localities, history, memory, cultural identity and senses of belonging [but also how] individuals generate opportunities to make their cities sound, how those sounds transform the space in its acoustic, social, affective, physical, and perceptual dimensions, and how this type of agency presupposes a civic and political action."³² The practices that Baker and Bieletto-Bueno articulate largely denote the use of music and sound to do something in or develop affective relations with particular urban spaces. They refer to urban experiences rather than to the acknowledgment of an elite's listening as an epistemic practice and labor not only to understand the world around them but also to establish networks and strategies for political and intellectual influence and mobilization. Bieletto-Bueno's description insinuates the latter, but just like Baker's, her choice of the noun *city* is still meant to focus on a particular metropolitan area rather than serving as a metaphor for an urban elite and their intellectual projects. For that reason, Baker's and Bieletto-Bueno's choices of terms are suitable for their endeavors as they refer to practices that have made the city sonorous or vibrating/vibrant and deal with sound in the city as an ordering social and affective factor.

In this book, I propose the term *Aural City* instead of options like *Sonic City*, *Sonorous City*, *Vibrating/Vibrant City*, or my own previously preferred expression, *Sounded City*. Originally, I coined the notion of the Sounded City to conceptualize the urban elite and their work as described above. Adjectivized with the past participle of a verb, the idea referred to the quality

of something that has been sounded out or searched for, as well as something that has been powerfully projected as the result of an action or the outcome of a certain labor.³³ Although I still consider this sounding action to be an essential feature in the relation between sound and listener that characterizes the intellectual urban elite at stake here, in the end I chose to use the term *Aural City*. The reason is that rather than a simple interest in experiencing or describing sound itself, what truly characterizes this elite is their aurality or how their listening produces a certain type of sonic and sound knowledge. In other words, the Aural City as I propose it emphasizes aurality and listening as labor. They are the type of labor needed in order to make something sound, meaningful, understandable, circulated, and reproducible as part of larger intellectual projects. Moreover, the concept of the Aural City also helps in mapping out how, regardless of the Lettered City's heralded decline, the Latin American elites that coalesced around the idea of the Lettered City continue to carry cultural and political valence at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In doing that, I am interested in taking the Aural City as a model for cultural critique and political struggle that, while articulating some of the premises of the Lettered City, transcends its transhistorical efforts and political alliances.

Ana María Ochoa Gautier has already invoked Rama's Lettered City in the context of an intensification of the aural in Latin America derived from the democratization of modes of circulation, mediation, manipulation, and reproduction of sound in the region that globalization has made possible. In *Aurality* (2014), Ochoa Gautier takes a critical stance toward the kind of unsuspecting optimism—what Jonathan Sterne has called the “audiovisual litany”—that characterizes some scholarship in sound studies by stating that “its complex relation to the political theology of orality and to alterity [continuously returns] as an obvious construction despite repeated historical deconstructions. [This is] the ‘spectral politics’ of modern aurality—this capacity to present itself as ‘an other’ when it is in fact ‘the same.’ . . . Without suspecting it, what we are doing is reproducing the same sensorial/expressive scheme that we are critiquing.”³⁴ In her early work on these developments, Ochoa Gautier maintained that “under the contemporary processes of social globalization and regionalization coupled with the transformations in technologies of sound, the public sphere is increasingly mediated by the aural. These processes are, if not subverting, at least displacing the relation between the sonic and the lettered word.”³⁵ She concluded that “this is not so much an issue of the sonic replacing the lettered, as a move from the gaze to listening as a locus of analysis and political

struggle.”³⁶ Evidently, Ochoa Gautier was aware of the negative epistemological connotations of the term *Lettered City* and thus avoided referring to this shift in terms of an Aural or Sounded City, preferring to coin the term “aural public sphere” since “the public sphere is being redefined to include forms of participation which are not channeled by the forms of debate or participation historically recognized as such by official polity.”³⁷ Ochoa Gautier’s aural public sphere emphasizes the shifts that such democratic access to sound and an inclusive construction of knowledge may make in redefining political strategies and ideologies of nation building.

There are important conceptual differences between the notion of the aural public sphere and that of the Aural City. The aural public sphere is a concept that invokes a cultural area, a situation, a condition, or a region; besides invoking an area of social and cultural life, the Aural City speaks of a heterogeneous amalgamation of individuals, clusters, ventures, and institutions; missions and commissions; strategies, policies, and, most important, a type of labor that makes these alliances and projects possible. Regardless of whether the Aural City could be associated with the type of cultural labor that characterized the Lettered City or could be understood as a reaction against it—as the case studies in this book show, depending on the particularities of the projects it is involved with, it could be described either way—it is manifested or materialized in a series of networks developed to enact the type of labor at stake. Thus, rather than just an urban space, the Aural City refers to an intellectual elite whose agency, labor, and the cultural regions they develop are established and channeled through a variety of networks. Sometimes these cultural regions may map onto specific urban geographies; however, the Aural City’s labor and networking efforts often transcend these topographies. Therefore, the Aural City should be understood as a series of cultural networks developed to enact the type of labor that characterizes their strategic engagement with sound, space, and practice.

It must be clarified from the outset that individuals acting within this Aural City do not engage with sound in a uniform manner. Those involved in patrimonial projects tend to ascribe value to sound in itself, especially sounds that can be traced back to important historical figures or moments, or iconic geographic locations and cultural practices. This tendency often leads to a fetishization of the objects that store these recorded sounds as well as the archives that hold these objects. For others, sound acquires meaning only in relation to a listening subject. However, what most of these folks agree on is that listening is a knowledge-conducive practice

and a way of making sense of the world. Thus, the Aural City's labor is based on the premise that listening is a "resonant power" that, as Lizette Alegre González and Jorge David García argue, invoking Veit Erlmann's work on modern aurality, resonance, and reason, "connects the different epistemic, affective, and sensorial dimensions that are part of the social framework, and the way individuals relate to it."³⁸ Since listening is not just an "auditory sensory phenomenon, [but] an act that recognizes the constitutive hierarchy that predates any sonic expressive genre," the labor of the Aural City revolves around the artistic and intellectual strategies that, as Ana Lidia Domínguez Ruiz puts it, "understand the individualization, socialization, culturalization, and adaptation processes that mediate our relationship with sound [and] account for the ways in which the world is configured under an aural logic."³⁹

Although I understand the Aural City as a system and a type of labor rather than as a specific group of individuals or an urban space, it is still important to mention that it is individuals, their agency, their labor, and their ability to network that define this otherwise abstract entelechy. Thus, it is relevant to unveil, if not their names, at least their presence and participation in a number of cultural spaces, projects, and institutions, in order to get a better sense of how their positionality defines the character of the Aural City also as that of an intellectual elite, albeit often differently situated socially, culturally, and ideologically than the traditional elites enacting the Lettered City. Such recognition may also help in understanding the intersections of the Lettered City and Aural City projects and making sense of the mobility of individuals continuously traveling across the often-porous lines dividing them.

In the last chapter of *In Search of Julián Carrillo and Sonido 13* (2015), I refer obliquely to the Aural City when discussing the unique alternative audiences attending concerts featuring Julián Carrillo's microtonal music in the 2010s. These were audiences who "may have heard about Carrillo and *Sonido 13* [the Thirteenth Sound] through cultural channels and networks that override the elitist world of classical music, engaging instead the mystic and mysterious representations of Carrillo that circulate via Mexican popular music."⁴⁰ Although people trained within the Mexican music conservatory system were members of these audiences, most of them were folks whose intellectual interest in experimental music and sound developed outside of academic music spaces. The work of Arturo Castillo, Víctor Garay, Alfredo Martínez, and Juan Pablo Villegas with Mexican Rarities that I explore in chapter 5 clearly reflects this dimension of the Mexican

Aural City. My second encounter with individuals whose labor could place them within the Aural City was in 2012, when I was invited to teach a seminar in music and performance studies at the Escuela Nacional de Música, the music department of Mexico's Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). At that time, I was able to identify some of the unique features of these folks' training as well as their approach to sound and music when Carlos Prieto Acevedo, Rossana Lara Velázquez, and a few other members of an intellectual project that would lead to the establishment of the Seminario de Arte y Sonido in 2014, invited me for a collective conversation. For me, one of the most salient features shared among these individuals was that, except for Lara Velázquez, none of them were trained as musicians or musicologists. Their interest in experimental music and sound came from intellectual conversations in their own disciplinary fields: art history, sociology, philosophy, communications, anthropology, and so on, which often bypassed the ideological prejudices that had characterized music academia since its inception as a scholarly field and that still typified it at the beginning of the twenty-first century: an emphasis on the Western art music tradition, a disdain for popular music, a particular canon of "great men," and a fetishization of the musical work as a depository of unequivocal and univocal meaning. In *Unbelonging* (2023), Iván Ramos studies a number of distinct Mexican subcultural scenes (punk, metal, sound art, computer music, electronic music, etc.) characterized by a "sonic refusal [that] fueled a generation of younger contemporary artists who were attempting to run away from historical and aesthetic legacies that tied national and ethnic identities to specific aims and aesthetic forms."⁴¹ Although Ramos's intention is not to identify any specific artistic or intellectual elite, his study does outline the labor and mission of these subcultural and underground scenes—a rejection of consumerist and nationalist mentalities—in ways that resonate with the work of what I have called the Aural City. Ramos also identifies a number of spaces as well as formal and informal institutions that are fundamental for the existence of the subcultural projects he studies and that have also been central to the development of the Mexican Aural City's networks and the circulation of its work: El Chopo (both the museum and the *tianguis* [street market]), Museo Ex Teresa, Radio Educación, Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Centro Digital, Centro Cultural Tijuana, Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), and so on. Although these are not the only places that the Aural City favors, they are indeed some of the institutional spaces that often welcome them and their projects. To borrow the popular

Mexican saying, *Ni son todos los que están, ni están todos los que son* (Not all of those who are there belong, and not all of those who belong are there), yet these accounts do offer glimpses into some of the names, spaces, and strategies one could associate with the Aural City. *The Archive and the Aural City* deepens the study of their shared ideals and the particular individual and collective intellectual and artistic strategies to achieve them, but rather than simply naming individuals, I provide a series of road maps to identify them and their work.

Like the Lettered City, the Aural City is undeniably a privileged artistic and intellectual elite. Although its constituency is very heterogeneous, its citizens tend to be well educated and intellectually curious, have access to resources, and enjoy a cultural capital that differentiates them from other working-class subaltern groups whose voices are largely silenced in Mexico. In that sense, the Aural City, in its inherent connection to the Lettered City, resonates with the shortcomings of what Robin James has termed the “sonic episteme.” It “remakes and renaturalizes all [the political baggage inherited from Western modernity] in forms more compatible with twenty-first-century technologies and ideologies—which is exactly what the neoliberal episteme does with its calculative rationality.”⁴² Nevertheless, one of the main differences setting the Aural City apart from the Lettered City is precisely the former’s general skepticism toward the nationalist and modernist projects whose promotion was central to the intellectual and political agendas of the Lettered City. This critical attitude also defines the Aural City’s relation to national institutions. While during most of the twentieth century—certainly after the Mexican Revolution—citizens of the Lettered City were organic intellectuals who pushed for the creation of national institutions and whose political agenda was often channeled through them, the citizens of the Aural City are savvier in their articulation of these institutions. Rather than uncritically embracing the mission of these spaces, the citizens of the Aural City often engage them when their work with these bodies helps them advance their own personal and collective agendas. In other words, there are certainly moments and geographies in which the contemporary Lettered City and the Aural City intersect or overlap, especially in their understanding of listening as a point of entry into knowing the world around us. Nevertheless, as the case studies presented here show, national institutions often seek to control the way in which listening practices are conceived and enacted in order to promote top-down nationalist and modernist projects, while the Aural City is often interested in the agency behind individual listening practices as a way to empower

the listener and expose the shortcomings of these nationalist and modernist agendas. So, rather than conceptualizing an “institutional Aural City” and a “noninstitutional Aural City” as a dichotomy defined in terms of particular individuals to whom one should attach those labels unequivocally, univocally, and in perpetuity, considering the porosity between them, one should think about them in relation to specific and unique types of labor that respond and eventually advance different political projects. In that sense, the Aural City’s potential to disrupt central tenets of the Lettered City also resonates with what James recognizes as productive ways to “think with and through sound” in order to “avoid and/or oppose the systemic relations of domination that classical liberalism and neoliberalism create.”⁴³

Sound and Sound Objects as Intangible Heritage, Memory, and Patrimony

At this point in this introduction, the unique nature of the archival projects discussed in this book is evident: We are dealing with archives whose mission is to store sounds. Despite its obviousness I want to highlight this because we are dealing with sound within an epistemic shift regarding the production and circulation of knowledge. This shift impacts the authority of certain cultural elites and raises important questions about the nature and understanding of sounds as memory, heritage, and patrimony.

The fact that UNESCO has elevated some of the collections studied here to the category of Memory of the World makes this discussion particularly salient. Such recognition bestows significant importance on the institutions hosting these archives and validates them locally, which is especially significant in the precarious context that has characterized the development of cultural projects in Latin America. This precarity has become more extreme due to budget cuts imposed by neoliberal policies.

Evidently, as Brian Kane explains, sound is intangible, ephemeral, and invisible; it is a temporally contingent event, matter, or flux.⁴⁴ Recording technologies may help sound transcend its transient nature by creating a sound object out of it. However, the sound object should never be confused with the sound *qua* vibration. As Michel Chion states, “The sound object is something perceptual”; it is not the sound itself nor its physical source but rather how we come to perceive it in a materially mediated way.⁴⁵ Once a particular sound transcends its temporal contingency by being recorded into a sound object capable of reproducing it, our relationship

to the sound qua vibration ceases. We no longer listen to the original vibration; we listen to a material imprint left in the past by its specter, frozen in time. Yet, as Jonathan Sterne argues, this “may be the moment when we credit the tool for the sound.”⁴⁶ In other words, our alienation from the sound qua vibration may lead to a fetishization of the object that stores it, attributing the properties, qualities, and values of the event in flux to the technology that allows its anachronous reproduction. This dynamic is articulated in the discussion about the patrimonial rhetoric that characterizes national archives such as Mexico’s Fonoteca Nacional (National Sound Archive), which is studied in chapter 2. Moreover, the political implications of this paradox are further explored in chapter 4, in relation to the type of fetishization implied by the patrimonial invocation of sound in national and imperial archival projects such as the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv (Berlin Phonogram Archive). Differentiating the sound object and sound qua vibration and avoiding conflating them is essential in understanding the fetishization that often occurs in affective local characterizations of patrimony and how UNESCO assesses sound objects and sound qua vibration in relation to its prevailing notions of memory and heritage.

The archives discussed in this book evoke sound through sound objects. These archives do not actually store sounds; they safeguard the objects that mediate or represent sounds and often take advantage of the dynamics of fetishization that provide these materials with their aura of authenticity to further the institution’s patrimonial logic. Consequently, even though these archival projects deal with intangible elements, the fact that their actual storing, cataloging, and circulating efforts focus on the material sound objects makes these collections ineligible to be classified as intangible cultural heritage according to UNESCO’s definition, which describes it as the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”⁴⁷ In sum, what this institution considers intangible cultural heritage are oral traditions, performing arts, ritual practices, and traditional craftsmanship, not their recording in physical formats. Thus, UNESCO considers musical traditions such as Mexican mariachi, Argentinean tango, or Cuban rumba to be intangible heritage but not collections of recorded music or sound. For the most part, these collections and recordings fall within the category of documentary heritage and are thus eligible to be labeled Memory of the World. Documentary heritage is defined by UNESCO as documents comprising “analogue or digital informational content and

the carrier on which [they] reside. . . . [They are] preservable and usually moveable. The content may comprise signs or codes (such as text), images (still or moving) and sounds, which can be copied or migrated. The carrier may have important aesthetic, cultural or technical qualities. The relationship between content and carrier may range from incidental to integral.”⁴⁸ In sum, for the archives I write about, what UNESCO considers Memory of the World is actually the material objects where those sounds have been recorded, not the sounds themselves. These considerations are important for navigating the notions of memory, heritage, and patrimony that inform the different case studies in this book.

Listening to the Archive of the Aural City

Throughout this book, I repeatedly invoke science fiction and poetry as ways to jumpstart the discussion of certain matters and topics that are central to the arguments in each of the chapters. In the epigraphs that open each chapter and in the presentation of the ideas that inform my take on each of the case studies in the book, I refer to plots and imagery from literature, films, and poems. This is because good science fiction and poetry have the power to make us reflect on the human condition and offer unforeseen avenues to engage issues of memory, identity, time, and representation. These themes lie at the core of our humanity and pungently inform the discussions about how we relate to, use, and could potentially revamp archives. As José Montelongo’s alter ego proposes in his novel *No soy tan zen* (2022), poetry is a way to use words to reveal the world that “hides behind the words.”⁴⁹ In this case, paraphrasing Montelongo, poetry and science fiction are points of entry into revealing the world that hides behind the documents in the archive(s). For me personally, science fiction and poetry have allowed me to free myself from some of the dogmas of academic writing and thought and have afforded me an estranged perspective on archival documents and materials that I believe has been conducive to finding instances of *lo inaudito* in the archive. My articulation and understanding of these archival constellations and the questions that guide my exploration of them would not have been the same without the liberating affective and intellectual input of these artistic expressions.

Chapter 1, “Performative Listening, Writing, Reading, and the Assemblage of Archival Constellations,” focuses on an archival network developed by me in order to expose the placeholders that keep together the larger archive of Mexican nationalism, one that both creates an essentialist past and

argues for a teleological future. Inspired by Ana María Ochoa Gautier's admonition to conduct "acoustically tuned explorations" that help us dilucidate the ways in which certain listening practices have been entextualized into written archives, the archival constellation at stake in this chapter is the result of putting in dialogue two books and an exhibition: Daniel Castañeda and Vicente T. Mendoza's *Instrumental precortesiano* (1933), Carlos Chávez's *Hacia una nueva música/Toward a New Music* (1932–37), and the musical side of the exhibit *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, 1940)—which I contend was partly a materialization of the ideas featured in the aforementioned books.⁵⁰ This archival constellation offers a window into recognizing the performative relation between modernity and tradition that informs the postrevolutionary Mexican nationalist narrative. Articulating this as an archival constellation offers an aural space for us to hear an *inaudito* counterpoint between the invention of the past and the imagination of the future that is key in understanding the aspirational essentialism that has informed Mexican music historiography since the 1930s. One of the goals of the chapter is to highlight how music was also an instrument used by the Lettered City to further the nationalist turn that their civilizing project took after the Mexican Revolution, which makes Chávez and the actors who took part in this project into a type of proto-Aural City.⁵¹

Chapter 2, "Patrimony, Objectification, and Representation at Mexico's Fonoteca Nacional," explores the foundation and mission of Mexico's national sound archive in order to understand how the nationalist nature of this project determines the type of labor informing the activities it sponsors, the sounds it deems worth preserving, and the types of listening it privileges. By analyzing the disciplining character of the soundscape and sound map projects conceived by the Fonoteca Nacional's staff, this chapter argues that regardless of the archive's rhetoric about democratization of knowledge, its activities often reproduce the civilizing project of the Lettered City as well as the aesthetic canons privileged by the proto-Aural City discussed in chapter 1. These shortcomings lead to an understanding of the circulation of information and knowledge based on a top-down model that misses the opportunity to engage the sounds that are most significant to the archive's users in their everyday lives.

Chapter 3, "Critical Constellations of the Audio-Machine in Mexico and the Performativity of Archiving/Archival Labor," analyzes *Critical Constellations of the Audio-Machine in Mexico*, a sound exhibit presented at Berlin's Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien as part of the 2017 CTM Festival (an

annual music event in Berlin), to ponder the political implications of archival construction and deconstruction. By paying attention to how Carlos Prieto Acevedo, the exhibit's curator, introduces chaos into the archive in order to deactivate the nationalist narratives behind the Mexican music canon and to rearticulate it in novel rhizomatic ways through an active engagement with his audiences' corporeality, I explore how estrangement may open new paths for a recognition of *lo inaudito* and, in this case, a post-national reimagination of the body politic. I argue that Prieto Acevedo's kind of archiving/archival labor generates a libidinal economy that, in tune with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theorization about schizophrenia, may provide the epistemic conditions for new socio-personal orders.⁵² Invoking Deleuze and Guattari's ideas here is not gratuitous; it is a response to the critical theory background that informs much of Prieto Acevedo's curatorial work. This theoretical background is shared by many citizens of the Mexican Aural City.

The objects and documents in an archive usually tell and retell stories that performatively reproduce the larger ideological frameworks informing the dynamics between objects, documents, representations, and users. The central concern in chapter 4, "Things, Sound Objects, and Legacy at the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv's Konrad T. Preuss Collection," is whether it is possible (and how) for archives to tell stories different from the ones they are designed to tell us. The first half of the chapter studies the collections of Náayeri and Wixárika chants recorded for the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin by Konrad T. Preuss between 1905 and 1907 (and currently housed by the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv and the Humboldt Forum) and proposes that the way the sound objects in those collections were created responds more to Preuss's expectations regarding these Indigenous communities than to how these communities conceptualize their music and ritual practices. Based on Arjun Appadurai and Silvia Spitta's take on thing theory as well as Sandra Rozental's exploration of the uses of patrimony in Mexico, the second part of the chapter explores how Mexican anthropologist Margarita Valdovinos has engaged this archive since the 2000s.⁵³ It proposes that her interrogation of its constituent materials, with the end of repatriating its recordings to Náayeri and Wixárika communities in Mexico, is a model of how to ask questions of archives that force them to tell us stories different from those embedded in their design, structure, and materiality. Valdovinos's listening in detail to the archive and the transnational mobility of its sound objects exemplifies the type of performative labor that characterizes the Aural City.

The historical chronology of the archival complexes explored in chapters 1 through 4 shows the trajectory of the Mexican postrevolutionary nationalist discourse. Chapter 1 explores its development in relation to ideas about the past and the future of the Mexican state; chapter 2 investigates the logic of an archive informed by this discourse; chapter 3 studies a postnationally informed way to rearrange the objects in the archive in order to turn the nationalist narrative on its head; and chapter 4 analyzes a strategy that reevaluates the sound objects in an imperial archive in order to listen to the silences such an archive entails and repatriate the objects to their communities of origin, while avoiding the nationalist patrimonial efforts that often inform these types of restitution projects. Conversely, chapter 5, “Mexican Rarities, *Disco pirata*, and the Promise of a Sound Archive of Postnational Memory,” explores two archival projects of postnational inspiration. Following on recent scholarship about postnational memory by Nadim Khoury and Nigel Young, this chapter studies Mexican Rarities, an archival project developed in Mexico City in 2020, and *Disco pirata*, a 2016 performance action turned sound archive, as models for a possible postnational rearrangement of the logics and dynamics informing the traditional archive(s).⁵⁴ Mexican Rarities is an analog archive focused on the identification, storage, and recirculation of Mexican alternative experimental sound and music projects that, by way of their bizarre and eccentric nature, escape the patrimonial gaze of the Mexican state’s nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand, *Disco pirata* was started by French sound artist Félix Blume (with Despina Panagiotopoulou and Diego Aguirre) as a project to record everyday sounds that he identified as endemic to Mexico City. The recorded sounds were then packaged as a pirate CD, imitating informal-economy circulation strategies, and later featured as part of a larger sound installation at the Fonoteca Nacional that sought to encourage *chilangos* (Mexico City natives) to develop more deliberate ways of listening to the sounds of their city. Eventually, Blume uploaded *Disco pirata* as an open-access internet archive available for free downloading and use. This move presented sound designers in the Mexican film industry with a significant resource when trying to re-create the sonic environments of Mexico City in film. Based on Cristina Rivera Garza’s conceptualizations of *norinales* (nonoriginals), *escrituras geológicas* (geological writings), and *escrituras colindantes* (adjacent writings), as well as her theorization about archives as the previous future of a hyperreal present, this chapter examines the potential and shortcomings of these two archives as repositories of postnational meaning in continual flux rather than as databases of fixed, static value.⁵⁵

Mexican composer Julián Carrillo spent most of the last forty years of his life crusading for microtonal music—especially his so-called Sonido 13—as the future of the Western art music tradition. Nevertheless, Carrillo’s constant invocation of nature and law in his theorization of microtonality established a universal, general prescription of Sonido 13 as a closed normative system. If the future Carrillo dreamed of never truly materialized, the presentation of his fifteen microtonal Carrillo Pianos at the Expo 58 in Brussels opened the door for his ideas to have a new life in a different future. Chapter 6, “Aurality, Materiality, and the Carrillo Pianos as Archives,” takes the idea as well as the storing, retrieval, and circulation logics of an open-access archive such as Blume’s *Disco pirata* and expands it to study the production, circulation, storage, and eventual reinvention of the Carrillo Pianos as metaphorical and literal open-source archive(s). As a figurative interpretative tool, this notion facilitates an exploration of these instruments as archival interfaces of futurity that, following on the work of Thor Magnusson, Carla Maier and Holger Schulze, Roger Moseley, and Alexander Rehding about instruments as archives, provides windows into how individuals can reinvent instruments according to new sonic fantasies about their own presents and futures.⁵⁶ Although these instruments were designed with specific musical goals in mind, they have the anarchist potential of becoming sources of new sounds and creative processes in line with the sonic affordances stored in the instruments’ materiality. If instruments can be considered archives, one should ask what they are designed to preserve, how one can retrieve that from them, and whether one would be able to retrieve something else from them. Indeed, in the spirit of finding ways to allow archives to say something different from what they were designed to say, I explore the notion of the open-source archive in relation to how poetry, as in the work of Polina Barskova, has been described as an experience that enables the affective recovery of that which the archive has rendered invisible.⁵⁷ Thus, a poetic, aesthetic, and creative exploration of the open-source archive may provide access to *lo inaudito* in ways that resonate with Sean Williams’s call for the use of poetry in ethnography “as a pathway for understanding an array of experiences in the field, raising essential issues in fieldwork for our students, or transmitting cultural knowledge through multisensory ‘creative making.’”⁵⁸

Chapter 7, “In Search of the Aural City: Collective Action and the Invisible Sound Archive,” is a dual exercise. It attempts to identify a series of archival projects that reside on the internet in close to invisible fashion while providing a more tangible picture of the Aural City and its citizens. These

projects live at the triple intersection of being discursively invisible, being analogically invisible, and representing an invisible nonplace. In this chapter I map out a network of these archival projects by following the actors who made them possible and by establishing connections among them. Once the voices of these individuals and their projects are identified, I let them guide the conversation about what sound archives mean for them. Archives and archival networks are not inherently visible or invisible; they may appear one way or the other depending on whether one knows how to look for them or identify their traces or not. I take this exploration of the archive as an excuse to learn how to look and listen anew. Central to this exercise is an examination of the labor of the constituencies who put together and maintain these virtual repositories as well as my own labor as the researcher identifying and articulating them serendipitously by following the actors behind them. Focusing on the routes that enable this archiving/archival labor also shows the pragmatic and savvy ways in which many citizens of the Aural City engage larger institutional spaces and projects as long as doing that furthers their individual intellectual agendas and those of their allies.

Meant as a conclusion or epilogue of sorts, “The Relevance of Archives in Times of Post-Truth: An Essay Against Nihilism in the Neoliberal Age” aims to tie together the ideas and case studies in the previous chapters by thinking about the relevance of archives at a historical moment in which their traditional value as repositories of truth is being challenged by progressive and conservative agendas alike. I argue that in times of post-truth it is imperative to understand the different ways in which these challenges to archival authority operate and what they mean in relation to notions of truth and falsehood. The epilogue closes with a call against the type of nihilism that the hopelessness of neoliberalism instills in contemporary society. If we can think of the sound archive as a nodal point that helps us make sense of the world by making sense of ourselves, then the archive can be a space for turning resignation into agency, and emotional capital into a liberating political resource. As I repeatedly argue throughout this book, to be able to encounter *lo inaudito* we just need to learn or relearn how to listen.

As a researcher, I do not intend to present myself as someone who brings an asserted objective perspective on my objects of study. Instead, I acknowledge from the outset not only that my subjectivity and positionality mediate how I approach and read my objects of study but also that my interaction with documents, stories, and practices often creates and shapes

these materials into their form as objects of study. This is evident in chapters 1 and 7, where the archival constellations and archival complexes that are featured as objects of study are evidently the result of my gaze into the vastness of the archive. But it is also tangentially clear in chapter 6, where, based on an understanding of instruments as archives, I explore strategies to aesthetically estrange the retrieval of the information stored in those archives. Rather than trying to defend my position, I will argue that scholars always mediate the information and documents they work with in order to define them as their archive. Nevertheless, I have also been directly and indirectly involved in some of the projects studied here as well as some of the institutions that the citizens of the Mexican Aural City articulate in their artistic, pedagogical, and intellectual ventures. The reader could argue that such experiences, along with my own interest in listening, sound, and Mexican and Latin American artistic scenes, make me a citizen of the Aural City. That is certainly a possibility. I would not argue against that other than pointing out that participant observation, a key methodology in anthropological and ethnographic work, also seeks to integrate the researcher into the cultural milieu being researched. Some may argue that such labor makes them part of the communities they study; some may think that believing that is a rather optimistic take on the benefits of ethnographic work; while others could rightfully argue that such claims are instances of the colonial gaze that continues to inform much of Western scholarship. The particularities of my case are complicated. However, I am not especially invested in answering that question one way or the other, and thus I leave it to the reader to decide whether my intellectual labor makes me a member of the Aural City or not.

DUKE

INTRODUCTION. Questions About the Circulation of Knowledge at the Sonic Turn

1. Cook, "Archive(s)," 601.
2. Mbembe, "Power of the Archive," 19–20.
3. Cook, "Archive(s)," 606.
4. Tomlinson, "Evolutionary Studies," 651.
5. Rivera Garza, *Escribir con el presente*, 60. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
6. Jacques Derrida coined the term *anarchive* to refer to the paradox that an archive's destruction may lie within itself, in "the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which *carries the law in its tradition*: the archon of the archive." See Derrida, "Archive Fever," 51.
7. Weld, *Paper Cadavers*, 238.
8. Rama, *Lettered City*, 16.
9. R. Murray Schafer coined the term "schizophonia" to describe the separation of sound from its original source. See Schafer, *New Soundscape*, 43–47.
10. Johnes, "Archives," 131.
11. See Simon, "Introduction," 101–107.
12. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 114.
13. Derrida, "Archive Fever," 14, 17.
14. Johnes, "Archives," 133.
15. See Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*; Arondekar, *For the Record*; Callahan, *Art + Archive*; Marshall and Tortorici, *Turning Archival*; Rosengarten, *Between Memory and Document*; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; and Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*.
16. Marshall and Tortorici, "Introduction," 1.
17. Frohmann, "Documentary Ethics," 166.
18. O'Callaghan, *Sounds*, 3. Similar conceptualizations can be found in Pinch and Bijsterveld, "New Keys," 11–14; Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," 9–10; and Bronfman and Wood, "Introduction," ix–x.
19. McEnaney, "Sonic Turn," 84.
20. Novak and Sakakeeny, introduction, 2.

21. Souza Lima, "Sound Beyond Hylomorphism," 49. See also Ochoa Gautier, *Aural-ity*; and Samuels et al., "Soundscapes."
22. Franco, *Decline and Fall*, 10.
23. I do not intend to reproduce traditional understandings regarding the relationship between civilization and sedentarism and the rise of cities. I address it only in relation to intellectual traditions that have assumed this chain of cause-and-effect events to be true and have used it as a foundational metaphor for their civilizing projects. Recent scholarship has questioned the historiographic naturalization of such dichotomies. See Graeber and Wengrow, *Dawn of Everything*, 276–440.
24. Rama, *Lettered City*, 13, 12–13.
25. Franco, *Decline and Fall*, 12.
26. García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens*, 39.
27. See Perus, "¿Qué nos dice hoy?," 56; Spitta, "Prefacio," 13; and Beverly, "Writing in Reverse," 628–29.
28. Steedman, *Dust*, 167.
29. G. Baker, *Imposing Harmony*, 20.
30. G. Baker, *Imposing Harmony*, 22.
31. See Curcio-Nagy, "Giants and Gypsies"; Ramos-Kittrell, *Playing in the Cathedral*; Vera, *Sweet Penance of Music*; and Waisman, *Historia*.
32. Bieletto-Bueno, "Introducción," 12.
33. See Madrid, "Landscapes"; and Madrid, "Rastreando."
34. Sterne, *Audible Past*, 15; and Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*, 16–17.
35. Ochoa Gautier, "Sonic Transculturation," 807.
36. Ochoa Gautier, "Sonic Transculturation," 808.
37. Ochoa Gautier, "Sonic Transculturation," 807.
38. Alegre González and García, "Presentación," 5. See also Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*.
39. Alegre González, "Más allá de la abyección," 11; and Domínguez Ruiz, "Oído," 94.
40. Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo*, 281.
41. Ramos, *Unbelonging*, 5.
42. James, *Sonic Episteme*, 4.
43. James, *Sonic Episteme*, 5, 6.
44. Kane, "Fluctuating Sound Object," 55.
45. Chion, "Reflections," 23.
46. Sterne, "Spectral Objects," 107.
47. "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage," UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.
48. "Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form," UNESCO, Memory of the World, November 17, 2015, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-preservation-and-access-documentary-heritage-including-digital-form?hub=1081>.
49. Montelongo, *No soy tan zen*, 45.
50. Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*, 3.

51. In a similar way, Amanda Minks explores the role of sound, “between the ear and the letter,” in the development of Lettered City projects in Mexico, Nicaragua, and Chile during the first half of the twentieth century. One could argue that the initiatives she studies can also be described as examples of proto–Aural City projects. See Minks, *Indigenous Audibilities*.

52. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*; and Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*.

53. See Appadurai, “Introduction”; Rozental, “On the Nature”; and Spitta, *Misplaced Objects*.

54. See Khoury, “Postnational Memory”; and Young, *Postnational Memory*.

55. See Rivera Garza, “Escrituras colindantes”; Rivera Garza, *Escrituras geológicas*; and Rivera Garza, *Restless Dead*.

56. See Magnusson, *Sonic Writing*; Maier and Schulze, “Tacit Grooves”; Moseley, *Keys to Play*; and Rehding, “Instruments of Music Theory.”

57. See Barskova, *Air Raid*; and Barskova, *Живые картины*.

58. Williams, “Poetry Writing,” 363.

CHAPTER 1. Performative Listening, Writing, Reading, and the Assemblage of Archival Constellations

An early Spanish version of this chapter was published as “Rastreando las huellas de la escucha performativa: La escritura como constelación archivística.” *Anuario Musical* 76 (2021): 11–30.

1. “Foreword of the Mexican Department of Foreign Affairs,” 10.

2. Chávez, introduction, 5, 10.

3. García Morillo, *Carlos Chávez*, 88.

4. These recordings are available at the following link: “A Program of Mexican Music,” Columbia Masterworks, 1941, posted June 1, 2019, by Avide, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo_9OokJees.

5. Kennedy, “Alex Steinweiss.”

6. At the end of the exhibit and its concerts, the MoMA donated those copies of pre-Hispanic instruments to the New York Public Library. Eventually, they became part of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art when the library collection of instruments was moved to the museum due to lack of storage space.

7. For a detailed analysis of *Xochipili-Macuilxochitl*, see Burns, “Listening,” 154–59.

8. Chávez, introduction, 7–8.

9. Chávez, *Xochipilli*. Although the conceptualization of the work as “imagined Aztec music” informs the way in which it was presented at the MoMA exhibit, it is only in this explanatory note that Chávez fully acknowledges it.

10. See Burns, “Listening”; Roberts, “Aztec Musical Styles”; and Saavedra, “Carlos Chávez.”

11. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 6.

12. See, for example, the first and second sections in Galindo, *Historia*, 17–124; and the first part of Saldívar, *Historia*, 1–83.