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Sound and Dissonance: Music in Latin American Culture

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This new issue of CROLAR is dedicated to music in Latin America, its “Sound and Dissonance.” From salsa in the Caribbean, carnival in Brazil, or tango in Argentina, to mention a few examples, music has always been inherent to what it means to be “Latin American,” sometimes creating stereotypes that can be very hard to overcome. But what does music really mean to Latin America? How can music express a national identity and at the same time connect us to other realities? These were some of the initial questions when putting together this issue, and the submitted reviews help us further the debate. How does the continent’s music history relate to its aural present? How is Latin America’s music tradition updated in the 21st century? And what are the challenges that the study of its sounds presents?

In the recent publications being reviewed here, three trends on sound studies become clear. The Focus section is thus divided into three subsections, following those trends: an interdisciplinary approach, a national approach, and a transnational approach. Firstly, the development of Sound Studies

shows an interdisciplinary trajectory that most of the publications underscore—with a more flexible approach than that of traditional musicology. This interdisciplinary approach is evident, for example, in visual artist Ana María Estrada Zuñiga and sociologist Felipe Lagos Rojas’ book, in which they trace a genealogy of Chilean aural art focused on the productive and creative relation between art and technology. Meanwhile, Cintia Cristiá goes after the tracks of elusive artist Xul Solar, and proposes a musical reading of his work, a suggesting exercise to reconsider the relation between these different artistic expressions. Another text based upon a musical imaginary is the one by Argentine writer Marcelo Cohen. In an intimate and personal book of essays, he narrates his experiences with translation. The translator is described as a musician performing his score. The books edited by Silvina Luz Mansilla and Frederick Luis Aldama focus on the relation between sound and music, and press and media. Mansilla’s book fills a void in the criticism of Argentina’s cultural market, with an impressive archival work on publications and magazines interested

in music. Aldama's is devoted to the study of the Latino involvement in US media and show business. Through fifteen articles with topics ranging from films to video games, the text contributes to the understanding of the Latin American role and representation in Media Theory. Finally, sound engineer Carlos Abbate offers a short but rich text that explores the technical vicissitudes of working with audio for film in Latin America.

A second group of works deals with the topic from a national or geographic perspective, approaching it according to specific regions or countries. This is the case of Ana María Ochoa's book. Analyzing aural perceptions in post-independence Colombia, her book challenges hegemonic categories of thought. With an exhaustive research that includes the acoustic exploration of travel journals, novels, texts in indigenous languages, and philosophical compilations, it is an innovative and pivotal contribution to both Sound and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Also centered around Colombia, Carmen Millan de Benavides and Alejandra Quintana Martínez's research presents a gender approach through the recuperation of forgotten figures and the reflection upon the different roles that Colombian women have had in the music scene. Around the Equator, Fernando Palacios Mateos takes us through his own exploration of the *andarele*, particularly its social context and historical development. His work on this Afro-Esmeraldean music genre includes a DVD with photographs, music, videos, and maps, to help us study this Ecuadorian

region. Meanwhile, Cláudia Neiva de Matos, Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros, and Leonardo Davino de Oliveira offer a collective effort to reflect upon different music modes that can be found mainly in Brazil. From indigenous genres of the colonial period to the contemporary urban rhythms of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, this volume (born out of a series of conferences) is an all-encompassing effort to portray Brazil's sung word history in an interdisciplinary way. Finally, making our way towards the Southern Cone, Vania Markarian studies the emergence of a political youth force in Uruguay at the end of the 1960's. Its title shouldn't be taken literally though. Music, in Markarian's analysis, appears as part of an emerging cultural production scene that can be read as a youth entry point to the political sphere. The question about the sound of those demonstrations and the revolutionary potential of music sparks an interest that emphasizes the need for future projects that explore politics from an aural perspective. Juan Pablo González Rodríguez's book also has a political background—postcolonial this time. It takes Chile as a case study to rethink the ways in which music is analyzed in Latin America and suggest new theoretical approaches.

Lastly, a third approach revolves around music's ability to cross borders and to create transnational bonds. The reviews that make up this section seek to underscore the dialectical and heterogenous nature that characterizes music, especially nowadays. For example,

the volume edited by Coriún Aharonián is the result of a conference that brought together African and American specialists in Uruguay. The book offers a multiplicity of voices and visions that reveal that theoretical and ideological differences are not foreign to the music field. Here, as well as in other reviewed works, the need for new concepts and approaches to music and sound studies is made evident. In the next reviews, music is understood as a revitalizing tool, in this case for Migration Studies. César Augusto Monteiro's work delves into the music community that Cape Verdean immigrants have built in the Cova da Moura neighborhood of Lisbon. As "visibility flags," music for these marginalized groups is a fundamental tool to face deterritorialization, identity, and exclusion problems. Through the example of Cape Verdean immigration in Portugal, Monteiro offers an entry point to a very current phenomenon. Another work that attempts a similar approach is the one by Íñigo Sánchez Fuarros. His text explores identity changes in the Cuban community in Barcelona, tracing different generational codes and dynamics that stand out in their musical experience.

This number also features three of CROLAR's recurrent special sections. In the first one, Interventions, Daniel Castelblanco tells us of the music by the Wayramanta, a metropolitan sikuris group based in Buenos Aires. With field recordings and reinterpretations, the album is both a musical creation and an ethnographic exploration. Castelblanco also highlights the importance of working

with the Jach'a laquitas genre, which has been excluded from the Trans-Andean music canon, as a result of class and state policies that have tended to style homogenization and westernization. A second intervention is offered by Gabriel Villarroel, who proposes a reading of Uruguayan writer Felisberto Hernández's sound universe in his autobiographical text "Por los tiempos de Clemente Colling" (1942). Noises and sounds from his childhood and youth dictate the rhythm and flow of his memory. The order and memory of his past is involuntarily destabilized—and finally directed—by the sounds of the locomotive or the laughter noises of the three sisters he used to visit.

The Special Section features an interview with Peter Schulze, professor at the Bremen University, who is currently researching the history of tango, ranchera, and samba; styles that have been adopted as national symbols in Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, respectively. Here, he talks about the importance of technology and media—especially cinema—in the development of these music genres. Underscoring national politics and their relation to cultural industries, Schulze dips into global and translational dynamics in a -as he calls it- work of "glocalization."

In the Classics Revisited section, Daniel Villegas revisits French philosopher Jacques Rancière to rethink his theories from an aural point of view. Offering a re-reading of "Aesthetics and Its Discontents," Villegas warns us against the challenging traps of the bond between art and politics,

the regimes that define the sensorium, and the difficulties of true political dissent. In short, he cautions us against the sometimes too quick celebration of art's disrupting possibilities.

Finally, the Current Debates section presents two contributions that move beyond the musical approach and explore other senses. With "Caribbean Food Cultures. Culinary Practices and Consumption in the Caribbean and Its Diasporas" we move from listening to tasting. This collection of essays aims at exploring the wide array of images, activities, and values associated to the Caribbean culinary world through an interdisciplinary lens. On the other hand, Claudia Rauhut's book takes us to the spiritual field, analyzing the global and transnational aspects of Cuba's santería, and the repercussions those have in its practice and discourse.

The multiplicity of disciplines that focus on the aural demonstrates the opening of a field that is no longer limited to anthropology or ethnomusicology. The challenge of encompassing such a varied universe resulted in a final selection of works that is highly heterogeneous and by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, a common observation in the reviews that comprise this number relates to the problematics of dealing with works and research with few local interlocutors. A lot of the reviewers have highlighted the contribution of these publications in an area that has had little promotion in Latin America until now. Another common

difficulty is the relocalization of knowledge, with a lot of authors still unable to expand the theoretical dialogue outside of the Western canon, and hence reinforcing its logocentric paradigm. In light of the reviewers' theoretical concerns, it is worth highlighting Ochoa's book as a project that not only questions, but also offers new ways of thinking sounds and their studies.

In summary, a lot of authors call for the need of an even more interdisciplinary approach to music, where gender or national borders serve as research tools, and not as the only way through which to understand something by nature so heterogeneous like music. There are many possibilities to approach and reflect about music in Latin America. As the cover picture shows, though, we hope the play on foci helps us in rethinking the already accepted, highlighting other perceptions, and dialoguing with other fronts. Enjoy this atonal number --that we hope gets heard.