

**BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS**

## A Latin American Ear

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America.** Edited by Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxi + 343. \$41.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780190842758.

**Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins.** By David F. Garcia. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. Pp. xii + 360. \$28.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822363705.

**Musicians in Transit: Argentina and the Globalization of Popular Music.** By Matthew B. Karush. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. Pp. x + 268. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822362364.

**Entre géneros y sexualidades: Tango, baile, cultura popular.** By Mercedes Liska. Buenos Aires: Milena Caserola, 2018. Pp. 172. \$32.90 paperback. ISBN: 9789874010021.

**Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia.** By Ana María Ochoa Gautier. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii + 266. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822357513.

**Oscar Alemán: La guitarra embrujada.** Sergio Pujol. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2015. Pp. 340. ISBN: 9789504945628.

**Valentino en Buenos Aires: Los años veinte y el espectáculo.** By Sergio Pujol. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical, 2016. (1st ed. 1994.) Pp. 224. ISBN: 9789873823084.

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The books reviewed in this essay all deal with music and sound, and they all speak of Latin America in one way or another. Together, they cover typically Latin American popular genres like mambo, cumbia, tango, and folklore, as well as transnational ones such as jazz, rock, and experimental music, this last being primarily understood as “serious” avant-garde music yet including some “experimental pop” as well. In fact, besides stressing their high scholarly standards and their timely contribution to ongoing debates in the academy and beyond, it is not easy to summarize what they have in common. Most of them deal with the twentieth century, but *Aurality* discusses nineteenth-century texts, and *Entre géneros y sexualidades* depicts a twenty-first-century dance scene. Not all the authors use Latin America as a geographical and cultural category in the same way. The introduction of *Experimentalisms in Practice* proposes “an understanding of Latin America as an assembly of shared experiences, attitudes, and technologies (or lack of) that is not necessarily tied to a specific geography,” and gives epistemological priority to “an identification connecting groups of people at supranational levels to whom precisely the label ‘Latin America’ makes sense” (11). This is a good basis for further conversation, but all authors do not necessarily share such a performative definition. In fact, most of them do not problematize it, as if it went without saying. Yet they all reflect on what Latin America is, or rather sounds like, thus potentially contributing to other trends in Latin American studies. Overall, they can also be said to participate in an ongoing aural or auditory turn, provided that, for once, we count music as sound.

One of the many strengths of Ana María Ochoa Gautier's *Aurality*, which deals with nineteenth-century Colombia, lies precisely in its reuniting the study of sound and the study of music. Such a convergence is not obvious, and it makes of the book a landmark in the history of both sound studies and Latin American (ethno) musicology. Music had always been *the* sonic object par excellence in the academy, before being marginalized in recent studies of sonic phenomena at large. Here, music is but one kind of sound among others. The focus is actually the voice, or rather, the voice-as-heard, a distinction which encapsulates the conceptual displacement from *orality* to *aurality*. Moreover, while in recent literature the oral has sometimes been used to deconstruct the hierarchy of the hand that writes over the mouth that speaks, Ochoa Gautier wants to "invert the emphasis" by "exploring how the uses of the *ear* in relation to the *voice* imbued the *technology of writing* with the traces and excesses of the acoustic" (7). By studying the voice-as-heard-as-written-about, she both contributes to the "aural turn" and suggests alternative paths to the current institutionalization of sound studies around a Western-centered paradigm: "The history of globalization needs to take into account histories and understandings of listening that come from radically different regions" (213). The result is a daring intellectual adventure, both for its theoretical richness and imagination, and for the literary and heuristic appeal of the many stories it tells.

Consider it as a narrative: its first characters are the *bogas*, the *zambo* men who, before the time of the steamboats carried passengers up and down the Magdalena River by pulling on long poles while relentlessly singing-howling characteristic utterances. These voices were described by many European and Creole travelers out of both curiosity and irritation, as they were the soundtrack of a situation that, for all the privileges of the passengers' passivity as the bogas kept working hard, could be experienced as a kind of sensorial captivity. One such traveler was German explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), who took what he heard for an "unbearable racket" yet recognized in it "the pleasure for cadence" (quoted p. 32), thus bringing together ears, voices, bodies, rhythms, and power. The background for this colorful sonic ekphrasis, understood as part of a "zoopolitics of the voice" (183), were colonial and postcolonial controversies on the human status of Indians and other nonwhites, framed by opposed Darwinian and biblical visions of the origin of the human species.

Then you have the agonistic quests for popular song of three Colombian intellectuals, who together seem to embody the political spectrum: José Vergara y Vergara (1831–1872), a white scholar and a key figure of Hispanic Catholic conservatism; Candelario Obeso (1849–1884), a writer, philologist, and translator of African descent; and Jorge Isaacs (1837–1895), a converted and anticlerical Jew who wrote one of the country's earliest ethnographies, the *Estudio sobre las tribus indígenas del Magdalena*. For Vergara y Vergara, says Ochoa Gautier, "the failed phoné of blacks is a diglossia that acoustically delimits their linguistic competence while recognizing the musicality of the voice" (96–97). Obeso's innovative transcription of oral singularities in *Cantos populares de mi tierra*, here described as a "phonography," produced a unique style of poetry. Isaacs heard indigenous languages from a modern, nonnormative perspective, thus contesting the default status of European languages and phonemic inventories. His essay unleashed an epic intellectual battle with the conservative "grammarians president" Miguel Antonio Caro (1843–1909), in whose writings Ochoa Gautier detects, in turn, a double "immunization" from animality: "Voice had to be hominized through acoustic techniques that cultivated the relation between musical sensibility and grammatical rationality" (176).

Thus, she argues, philology, eloquence, orthography, and music notation were crucial anthropotechnologies mobilized in political and intellectual disputes on the very definition of the nation. The voice was a highly sensitive political issue. The "aesthesis of vocal communion in folklore" (172) was important in nationalist thought at least since Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), and having a voice was an even older—indeed antique—metonymy for being entitled to political participation. Accordingly, Ochoa Gautier's theory of aurality is based in the assumption that, together with written practices studied by Ángel Rama and others, Latin America was "*constituted* by audile techniques, cultivated by both the lettered elite and peoples historically considered 'nonliterate'" (4, my emphasis). The statement is plausible, even if the change of scale from the nation to Latin America is not really addressed in the book. The case for the voice as a key for nation building is convincing, at least for Colombia, where a whole generation of political leaders found in writing representations of sound crucial intellectual resources to sketch concurrent imagined communities.

In search of a stronger basis for generalization, one feels tempted to add, to Ochoa Gautier's corpus of books and other published texts, sung pieces such as the Colombian national anthem, whose poem was written in 1850 by Rafael Nuñez (1825–1894) and put to music in 1887 by Italian composer Oreste Sindici (1828–1905). For one thing, that it mentioned the Christian faith made of it a sonic icon for the "confessional state" promoted by Caro, who was Nuñez's successor among the conservative presidents of the 1880s. At a transnational level, the genre of the national anthem epitomizes the modern symbolizing of the nation by

a collective voice that performs union through unison singing, a powerful political technique developed in eighteenth-century England and revolutionary France, before spreading in postcolonial Latin America. In short, state vocal music and its oppositional counterparts were arguably the most lasting and influential products of ideological constructions of a unified “voice of the nation” in Latin American countries, and elsewhere, from the nineteenth century up to the present time.

*Aurality*, though, is less about the history of symbolic practices than about the history of anthropological thinking, widely defined. It is a kind of intellectual history that privileges reading “the archive,” in a Foucauldian sense, to reading archives in plural, as most historians would do. Indeed, alternative sources such as correspondence or critical reception might have enriched and nuanced the epic tableau of intellectuals competing for ideological and political influence. Instead, Ochoa Gautier’s theoretical genealogy runs from the pioneering “acoustemology” of ethnomusicologist Steven Feld, who in the 1990s explored “ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiencing truth” (33), to anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivist reappraisal of boundaries between nature and culture, among many other references. With all that, Ochoa Gautier identifies her privileged objects as “acoustic assemblages” (22). This Deleuzian imprint gives additional food for doubting that distinctions between ethnomusicology, comparative musicology, musicology, sound studies, anthropology, and history make real sense for today’s critical scholarship. We might follow suit and question the making of things audible a criterion for defining the objects of study in the first place, rather than including them in wider sensorial and semiotic histories, as *Aurality* actually does by also putting writing at its core. Yet this would undermine the rationale for writing the present essay, namely to discuss different ways of writing on meanings transduced by sounds in a temporal space called Latin America, and beyond.

The epistemology of anthropological knowledge is also central to David F. Garcia’s wonderful *Listening for Africa*. It is not a book “on” Latin America but a contribution to the literature on the origins of “black music” in the US and elsewhere. In fact, many of the musicians and musicologists involved found their objects and impetus in different places of Latin America. The history of the sonic construction of “Africa” shows how Latin America and Africa were, and still are, connected in modernist views on global culture, in both popular and scholarly realms.

Garcia’s first chapter tells of the fascinating parallel quest for “the African origins of Negro music” by two very different scholars: Mieczysław Kolinski (1901–1981), a musicologist of Jewish descent, born in Poland and raised in Germany, who transcribed and analyzed—first in Berlin and after 1933 as a refugee in other European countries—hundreds of cylinder recordings of “African music” without ever setting foot in the places it came from; and Katherine Dunham (1909–2006), the African American anthropologist, dancer, and choreographer whose pioneering fieldwork in Haiti included documenting black communities’ dancing through film and being initiated to Vodun rites. As Garcia documents through correspondence and other materials, Erich von Hornbostel (1877–1935), the German comparative musicologist, asked his student Kolinski to work on recordings made by American anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1895–1963) and his wife, Frances, in Suriname, where black populations were believed to have kept their ancestral African ways of life. Herskovits—whose theory of acculturation was influential in the origins of black studies—was also Dunham’s advisor; yet, her participatory observation technique was rather out of tune with the anthropological standards of her time. Dunham’s simultaneous career as a performer, which eventually became her main activity, was a source of discomfort for many of her colleagues. And as a scholar she suffered from sexist biases, which also hindered fair acknowledgment of the research of anthropologist Helen H. Roberts (1888–1985) on “Possible Survivals of African Song in Jamaica,” published in the early twenties.

The triumph of racism and anti-Semitism in Europe contextualizes what was originally at stake in the long quest for African roots by liberal and anti-racist anthropologists, as well as their essentializing desire of finding a common origin of spirituals, blues, jazz, and Latin and Caribbean genres like rumba, mambo or, even if it is not addressed here, tango. Garcia suggests a continuity between anthropological knowledge and common sense notions about race and space, such as expressed in a 1940 New York daily under the headline: “Jungle Drums Sound as Africans Wed atop Skyscraper” (2). In Cuba, anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969), a founder of the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos, was influential in conceptualizing and diffusing Cuban music with his book *La Africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba*. He did it partly through public lectures given in the company of black Cuban musicians and dancers such as percussionist Pablo Roche *batá* ensemble, who also featured in modernist concerts by Gilberto Valdés (1905–1972), the composer of a song significantly entitled *Sangre africana*. “The African past that anthropologists and comparative musicologists articulated to the sonic content of field recording,” writes Garcia, “was similarly articulated to performances

and commercial recordings of dancers and musicians racialized as black" (72). And all this, in turn, affected what "Africa" sounded like on record, for "even before placing the disc on the record player ... the listener was preparing to go, as one reviewer put it, on an adventure" (80). Dunham's career also shows that kind of popular diffusion, since her fieldwork inspired her shows such as *Heat Wave: From Haiti to Harlem* and *Tropical Revue* (1943). Yet these transpositions did not go without modifications, as her producer bluntly admitted by declaring that for commercial reasons they had "to emphasize sex over anthropology" (187).

Garcia also describes developments in the cultural industries at large with no connection to the scholarly field. Artists such as Cuban soprano Zoila Gálvez (1899–1985) and many others "made race pride and feminism a question of praxis—and not just a goal of social scientific activity—by virtue of their embodying the histories of oppression" (144). Even experimental art was concerned with this transnational African imaginary: witness Harry Smith's 1940s films inspired by "cubop" tracks such as "Manteca" by Chano Pozo (1915–1948) and Dizzy Gillespie (1917–1993). The last chapter of *Listening for Africa* is a study of mambo, starting as an early 1950s' boom in which anthropologists were not directly involved. Instead, the musical protagonist, the Cuban Dámaso Pérez Prado (1919–1989), fought epic symbolic battles with bishops and other traditionalists, in the face of whom he declared that his favorite author was Jean-Paul Sartre and claimed that "music is frequently a stronger force than religion or politics" (250). Still, writers were puzzled by the phenomenon of "mambo dance addicts" who, according to critics, had "no interests in life except mambo and sex" (240). Witness the statement by Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980) to the effect that mambo was "a product of what has always been called 'modern life'" (233), or the claim by Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014), paraphrased by the author, that "the mambo's absurdity is modernity's absurdity" (247). This view of a Latin black music that embodied modernity itself rather than a primitive and/or mythological African origin, had to be reconciled with Pérez Prado's idea that he was "a collector of cries and noises" and that mambo was "a movement back to nature" (250). Even if the reference is missing in the book, as if it was somehow taboo, this tension can be traced back to Theodor W. Adorno's (1903–1969) controversial views on jazz and tango in his 1936 essay "On Jazz," where he dismissed primitivist racial imaginaries to better stress what he heard as this music's adaptive function to oppressive contemporary capitalism.

There is also a tacit Adornian dimension, as a contribution to the history of cultural industries, in Matthew B. Karush's splendid *Musicians in Transit*, which reconstructs the careers of seven Argentine musicians who achieved international recognition, namely Oscar Alemán (1909–1980), Lalo Schifrin (1932), Gato Barbieri (1932–2016), Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992), Sandro (1945–2010), Mercedes Sosa (1935–2009), and Gustavo Santaolalla (1951). Its subtitle eschews the regional level altogether: *Argentina and the Globalization of Popular Music*. And yet, Latin America is everywhere, including a chapter called "The Sound of Latin America" and devoted to Sandro, whose *baladas* became international hits from the late 1960s on: "His music," writes Karush, "represented a consumer preference through which a generation of Latin Americans identified themselves in opposition to North Americans" (108). As the author convincingly argues, the career of Mercedes Sosa also crucially depended on her embodying an indigenous persona and a *latinoamericanista* revolutionary sensibility. In turn, key to the success of Schifrin, Barbieri, and Santaolalla in the US and beyond was their identification as "Latin," eventually coupled with genres "jazz" or "rock." Even Piazzolla was sometimes labeled in this way, for all the nationalist versus cosmopolitan ambitions of his *Tango Nuevo*.

The book is about the agency of these people and a few others, as musicians successfully evolving in a globalized market. It intersects at several points with David Garcia's narratives, for instance when Karush describes how Schifrin included Afro-Cuban rhythms and sonorities in his "Gillespiana" concerto; or when he quotes a member of Maldita Vecindad, a Mexican rock band produced by Santaolalla, declaring, "When we started to play, within rock and roll orthodoxy, it was unthinkable to say that you liked Pérez Prado or that you liked cumbia. ... Later, it became a fad" (202). *Musicians in Transit* is a kind of geography book as it suggests that, for most of its characters, traveling in time and space was essential to their creating and performing. And "transit" is also a keyword for describing their switching between roles as composers, singers, instrumentalists, arrangers, and producers, and generic positions as keepers of generic purity or heralds of fusions and crossovers.

Yet the protagonists of these narratives are not only artists but also recording companies and other technical and economic mediators. Karush elaborates on previous scholarship on the tension between the unifying impetus of technical and economic globalization and its allowance of a wider diffusion of cultural differences. In this view, cultural diversity "does not constitute resistance to globalization" (4). The book starts with the claim by Argentinian rocker Fito Páez (1963) about musicians from "the South" having an advantage over those from "the North," since, he declared, "I could enjoy the Beatles, but they never heard Violeta Parra" (1). Karush takes this as "a reminder of the inequality that structures global cultural exchange,"

since Páez and his likes were “forced to compete directly against Elvis Presley, the Beatles, or Michael Jackson.” Underlining regional solidarities between artists, he goes on to remind us that Parra’s music came from Chile, not from Páez’s own country, while circulating “on recordings made by Odeon, a subsidiary of the British multinational recording company EMI and, in fact, the same company that distributed the Beatles albums in South America” (2). Yet, while stressing the “economic interest and ideological dispositions of the (mainly) men who run the major multinational corporations,” he notes that Páez “interprets this apparent weakness as a strength,” and does seem to grant a final word to these musicians in transit who “redirected transnational flows in ways that those in the boardrooms never anticipated” (7). Mercedes Sosa and Violeta Parra (1917–1957) are telling examples of the transnational logic of capitalism put at the service of a critique of its ideology. In short, *Musicians in Transit* is an important contribution to both the history of Argentine popular music and to the study of the transnational logic of cultural industries, which Karush had brilliantly explored in his previous book on the influence of radio, cinema, and tango on the birth of Peronism.<sup>1</sup>

A fine antecedent of that kind of cultural history is Sergio Pujol’s *Valentino en Buenos Aires*, first published in 1994 and recently reissued, which encapsulates the paradoxes of the transnational fluxes of desire in the imaginary scene of Hollywood star Rodolfo Valentino (1895–1926) seducing Argentine women *en carne y hueso*, despite the fact that he was a terrible tango dancer who never set foot in Buenos Aires. On the other hand, black singer and dancer Josephine Baker (1906–1975) did go to Buenos Aires in 1929, performing in the Teatro Astral together with a band called Los Negros Cubanos and arousing as much enthusiasm as criticism. By her very scenic presence, she indirectly contributed to a wider debate on music and race prompted since the beginnings of the decade by the discovery of jazz, and also by the first, controversial essay on the black origins of tango, Vicente Rossi’s 1926 *Cosas de negros*. Pujol offers a lively narrative of how in the 1920s musicians, actors, journalists, technicians, and businessmen (yes, mainly men) spent their days and, especially, their nights together, testing new forms of entertainment for the growing middle class that combined local figures and idiosyncrasies with international, that is, mostly US and French, inventions and imaginaries. His “cartografía del ocio” reconstructs the network of cultural practices, institutions, and technologies—including, of course, radio, cinema, and the recording industry—that made of Buenos Aires a modern, cosmopolitan capital. The book can be retrospectively seen as a landmark, given that it predates the trend of transnational cultural studies, of which Karush’s books and Marina Cañardo’s recent *Fábricas de músicas*, among others, are remarkable examples.<sup>2</sup>

Transnational fluxes are also a thread of Pujol’s other books on Argentina’s popular music and dance, like his 1999 *Historia del baile*<sup>3</sup> and most recently his biography of Oscar Alemán. Both Pujol and Karush view the long-forgotten Alemán as a charismatic, yet deviant figure in the history of popular music, and a mediator between different styles of globalized cultural productions. Contrary to Karush’s intentionally limited approach to the biographic genre, though—“I do not dwell on questions of personality or psychology, I generally avoid the musicians’ childhoods as well as their romantic and family lives, and I do not share the biographer’s pretense of completeness” (11)—Pujol writes a “classic” biography of the pioneering swing guitarist, including the dismissal of rumors about his love affair with Josephine Baker, whom he accompanied as a guitarist in Paris for years until the war forced him to return to Argentina, or the depiction of his legendary duos with French Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt (1910–1953) in the latter’s caravan. Also, his appreciations of Alemán’s virtuosity, while being technically accurate and pertinent, are openly subjective and impressionistic. Yet, for all their methodological nuances, both Pujol and Karush address in a thoroughly researched and intellectually astute way what makes Alemán a counterexample for the nationalist paradigm of cultural heroes. It is the story of an international star who was unfit for epic tales of an alleged white nation’s cultural singularity, as he embodied at once several ethnical, social, and stylistic hybridizations: an Argentine black jazz guitarist.

In tune with Alemán’s joyful subversion of normativities, his greatest hit to this day remains his 1943 astonishing version of “Bésame mucho,” “a true sabotage of the bolero’s sentimental education,” writes Pujol, “and a harsh blow to notions of identity and originality in music” (200–201). One feels tempted to ask the editors of *Experimentalisms in Practice*—Ana Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro Madrid—whether Alemán’s piece qualifies as experimental, given their definition of experimentalisms as “performative

<sup>1</sup> Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946* (Dunham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Marina Cañardo, *Fábricas de músicas: Comienzos de la industria discográfica en la Argentina (1919–1930)* (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical, 2017). This book was not included in this review since it originated in a PhD dissertation of which the author was the advisor.

<sup>3</sup> Sergio Pujol, *Historia del baile: De la milonga a la disco* (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical, 2011; 1st ed. 1999).

utterances that coalesce as such when practitioners act in experimental ways within the boundaries of their particular context” (3). Despite such a pragmatic—if pleonastic—definition, one might speculate that their answer would tend to be negative, since most objects of their book, for all its questioning of generic boundaries, remain anchored in the avant-gardist tradition of “serious” music. Still, counterexamples make up the second part of the volume, significantly entitled “Beyond the Limits of Hybridity.” Special crossover experiences such as Northeastern Brazil’s Cordel do Fogo Encantado, studied by Daniel Sharp, and the Peruvian *chicha* movement, charted by Joshua Tucker, are put in the company of the deviating aesthetics and production process, discussed by Madrid and Pepe Rojo, of the 1999 double CD *Revés/Yo Soy* by the Mexican band Café Tacvba—a group mentioned by Matthew Karush as an example of “new rock latino,” with its “amazingly eclectic array of musical genres,” in his chapter on producer Gustavo Santaolalla (203).

The result, to return to the editors’ sophisticated introduction to *Experimentalisms in Practice*, is “an unclear, messy picture of an experimentalism that has always been fragmented but has not been told this way” (6). The relative vagueness of the concept leaves one wondering whether it might also have left room for chapters on, say, Chile’s Los Jaivas or *tango electrónico* bands, among many others. In any case, it is clearly preferable to more rigid definitions. Moreover, as Benjamin Piekut acknowledges in a short afterword, it is instrumental to the book’s ambition of making *Music Perspectives from Latin America*—as the subtitle goes—a tool for revising the dominant paradigm of experimental music rather than just completing its peripheral landscape. It challenges the ethnocentric (Euro- and especially US-centered) narrative epitomized by Michael Nyman’s *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, which the editors reproach for “exclud[ing] Latin@ and Latin American practices” (5), and also to reproduce the anachronistic dichotomy avant-garde versus experimentalism. Instead, the reader gets a multifarious map of musical activities that unfolded in the region from the early 1960s up to recent times, starting with the double institutional portal of Argentina’s Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM), funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, and Cuba’s Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (GES), funded by the Cuban revolutionary state. With these two carefully researched essays, respectively by Herrera and Susan Thomas, the volume delineates the aesthetic common ground for the contradictory cultural politics of the Cold War as a matrix for later developments.

Accordingly, the book ends with two other chapters on Cuba and Argentina, respectively, Marysol Quevedo’s exploration of “revolutionary music” and Andrew Raffo Dewar’s essay on the anti-institutional and long-forgotten Música Más group. The whole makes for a truly important book that includes accounts of experimental and improvisatory scenes such as Colombia’s, by actor-witness Rodolfo Acosta; Mexico’s, by Tamar Barzel, who focuses in the collective improvisatory practices of the group Atrás del Cosmos in the 1970s, and their interactions with Don Cherry and Alejandro Jodorowski, with a special emphasis on the role of her female protagonist, Ana Ruiz; and Costa Rica’s, where noise musicians studied by Susan Campos Fonseca challenged in more recent years the traditional noise versus music binary, in a country whose institutional canon ignored twentieth-century avant-gardes altogether. *Experimentalisms in Practice* also discusses situations in which generic and technical innovations are strongly associated with progressive politics of class, gender, and ethnicity, like Alonso-Minutti’s lively ethnography of Gatas y Vatas, a feminist group of “Latin@” musicians from Albuquerque who deal in original ways with bodies altered by drugs and murderous violence against racialized women, among other socially sensitive topics.

Issues of gender and sexuality are at the core of Mercedes Liska’s insightful exploration of *tango queer* in Buenos Aires, a phenomenon that in the last fifteen years evolved from a niche for LGBTQ individuals to a stellar resource for translocal cultural tourism. Her ethnography follows the complex revisions of tango’s patriarchal heritage by observing dance floors where men dancing with men, women dancing with women, and also women leading men became increasingly accepted, eventually gaining presence and legitimacy beyond places identified as queer. Active and passive roles, freedom of improvisation and freedom of leading, different ways of switching between preassigned roles and identities—these symbolic impulses resonated with wider democratic issues in Argentine society, such as the 2010 Ley de Matrimonio Igualitario and the 2011 Ley de Identidad de Género. Even if Liska’s main interest is dance, substantial attention is devoted to music. A whole chapter deals with the connection between the *tango nuevo* dance style and the *tango electrónico* music subgenre, represented by groups such as Gotan Project, Bajofondo, Tanghetto, and others. These might well have entered in the discussions of *Musicians in Transit*—Karush does mention that Santaolalla was the founder of Bajofondo—and of *Listening for Africa*, given the adhesion of Gotan Project to the idea of the black origins of tango, which in their view justified the adding of rhythm machines in a traditional instrumental setting which didn’t include percussion. Liska persuasively argues for *tango electrónico* being an important—if, in her opinion, already past—moment of a critical reconfiguration of gendered identities framed by a music-dance genre that since the beginning of the twentieth century

incarnated at a global level the sonic and visual cliché of a cultural practice dominated by the desire of white heterosexual men.<sup>4</sup>

Unsurprisingly, male desire also commands most acoustic assemblages dealt with in the other books addressed in this review. Ochoa Gautier discusses Jorge Isaacs's novel 1867 *María*, not because of its feminine character's agency, but out of interest in the quasi-ethnographic descriptions of what Isaacs called the "natural music" of the bogas (114). Garcia quotes Katherine Dunham's reply to critics that "the only thing torrid and sexy about the revue is in the dirty mind of those customers who come to see sex" (192), thus giving hints of whose minds her show impacted in the first place. Karush acknowledges the "problematic" underrepresentation of female musicians in his corpus but says that "the male domination of genres like rock and jazz" is beyond the scope of his book (14). Pujol evokes Zulema—the fictional character of Roberto Arlt's *El amor brujo*—and her fugues to see Valentino in the movies as proof that the 1920s were "the first step of a slow but intense process of gender emancipation." The editors of *Experimentalisms in Practice* intend to decenter a narrative on contemporary art music focused in "predominantly white male practitioners" (6), yet they can't but point out as an exception the Albuquerque scene's "levels of inclusion and female equality rarely seen in experimental music" (15). Thus, the thread of gender appears in these books painfully seeking audibility in historical conversations where women's voices were most of the time silent or unheard. Together with the social, economic, racial, aesthetic, and territorial politics that give shape to this collective cartography of sonic cultural practices, it contributes to the polyphonic quest for justice that arguably, throughout history, at both a local and a global level, has been one of the many meanings of Latin America.

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<sup>4</sup> Among recent scholarship on tango see also *Tango Lessons: Movement, Sound, Image, and Text in Contemporary Practice*, edited by Marilyn G. Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), which was not considered in this review because the author contributed with one of the chapters.

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