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HISTORY AND SOUND CULTURES

Grandville, Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard
(1803-1847), "La Caricature", Paris, 1831-09-01

HISTORY AND
SOUND
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- ARTICLE -

HISTORY AND SOUND CULTURE: THE HISTORICIZATION OF LISTENING AND SOUNDS¹

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of recent production focused on the historicization of sounds and listening, present in the texts that compose the dossier *História e Cultura Sonora*. In general, it is possible to indicate that three major currents prevail in these works: the anglophone Sound Studies, the History of Sensibilities of French tradition and Latin American studies, which, although inspired by the previous two, strive not to confine themselves to classical discussions but to reflect on the specificities of sound production and modes of listening within their cultures. The text also evaluates the impact of phonography and the digitization of sound collections on historiographical production in the field of Sound Culture.

Keywords

sound culture – history of sensibilities – sound studies – phonography – cultural history.

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Resumo

O artigo traça um panorama da produção recente voltada para a historicização dos sons e das escutas, presente nos textos que compõem o dossiê *História e Cultura Sonora*. De modo geral, é possível indicar que três grandes correntes predominam nesses trabalhos: os *Sound Studies* anglófonos, a História das Sensibilidades de tradição francesa e os estudos latino-americanos que, embora inspirados nos dois anteriores, procuram não se limitar às discussões clássicas para refletir sobre as especificidades da produção sonora e dos modos de escuta de suas culturas. O texto também avalia o impacto da fonografia e da digitalização dos acervos sonoros na produção historiográfica no campo da Cultura Sonora.

Palavras-chave

cultura sonora – história das sensibilidades – estudos do som – fonografia – história cultural.

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The last two decades have been characterized by an acceleration and proliferation in the field of Humanities in general and History in particular, of investigations concerned with the historicity of sounds and listening. Broadly speaking, at least two assumptions can be identified that have guided these studies. First, there is the idea that sounds play a structuring role in human societies, serving not only communicative or aesthetic purposes – perhaps the most obvious – but also economic, social, political, and existential ones. Secondly, these works also recognize that as the aural environment changes over time, so do the ways in which individuals and groups listen, produce sounds, and make them audible. It's therefore possible to suggest that listening regimes⁶ not only vary over time or from one culture to another, but also that they are marked by divisions within communities or societies, indicating social distinctions and ordering what we might call “the distribution of the sensible” (RANCIÈRE 2005 [2000]). This phrase, inherently political in its connotation,⁷ refers not just to the division and distribution of senses and aesthetic experiences, but also to their sharing across a community. Contemporary times can help us better situate this issue. In a world marked by a kind of *sonorrhea*,⁸ which multiplies and bombards sound production on an unprecedented scale, and by the existence of increasingly manipulable sounds (portable devices that sonify our daily acts and tasks, audio messages that can be sped up, deepfakes that emulate voices and even speeches never uttered), what kinds of listening can we still identify and share? And to what extent does this (non)sharing reveal the historicity of sounds and our unique ways of listening?

The primary objective of this dossier was precisely to explore and gather current research from various fields of knowledge that may contribute to the study of the relationship between History and what we here call Sound Culture. This notion is by no means prescriptive and should be understood as the set of practices, perceptions, and conceptions associated with the sonorities and listening habits of a given community or society under specific historical circumstances. Thus, it is about highlighting the sonic dimensions of human life, their reproduction, and

⁶ Based on the analysis of some contemporary musical listening practices, Natalia Bieletto (2019) introduces the concept of “aural regimes.” The author believes that such regimes are established by epistemologies set within institutional orders that, when applied to musical listening, both condition and discipline the listening of these particular sounds as well as the musical practice.

⁷ According to Rancière, transformations in the realm of the sensible necessarily lead to new forms of political subjectivity, which are the author's primary object of interest.

⁸ Here we adapt the term ‘iconorrhea’, introduced by Joel Candau (2011) to describe the well-known prolific production of images in contemporary society. Although they may serve to record memories and identities, such images perhaps function more as agents of forgetfulness and fragmentation, shifting perceptions and complicating their understandings.

consequently, their historical dynamics. This territory encompasses not only the production and perception of ambient sounds but also auditory imagination, epistemologies of sound, auditory practices and their technologies, imposed or shared listening, the (in)audibility of certain cultures and/or social groups, the musical organization of sounds, and the ways they are perceived and disseminated. A comparison with the field of study known as Visual Culture is inevitable. However, while the latter has already accumulated theoretical reflections and empirical analyses allowing its structure and recognition as an object of historical knowledge,⁹ Sound Culture is still finding its footing, especially in Brazil.¹⁰ After all, investigating the sounds of the past is a slightly more complicated task due to the inherently evanescent and performative nature of sound. Some milestones, however, indicate the development of this field.

Since at least the 1980s, interest in sound began to guide researchers looking to go beyond the strict confines of acoustics and musicology, fields linked to the materiality of sounds and their appropriations in the form of music, respectively. Concerned with the cultural processes involved in the production, circulation, and reception of the sounds strongly present in our daily life, they made significant strides towards understanding Sound Culture, as done in that decade by the American anthropologist Steven Feld (1982 and 2015). Combining the words “acoustics”

⁹ It is not within the scope here to enumerate all the tendencies of this vast field of research, which encompasses everything from the history of the image, visuality, and gaze to the empirical study of pictorial, photographic, and cinematographic documents, among others. However, we can say that Jonathan Crary's (2012 [1990]) approaches to the techniques of the observer in modernity and Kittler's (2019) associations between cinema and phonography (and typewriters) are significant references. It's worth noting that many of the questions faced by historians interested in visual sources, visuality, or Visual History, raised twenty years ago by Ulpiano Meneses (2003), are equally presented today, considering the specificities of each field, to historians interested in the world of sounds and listening. Specifically, regarding these relationships and the tendency toward a certain intrinsic deafness in the formation of historiographical discourse, see MORAES, 2018.

¹⁰ In French historiography, the so-called History of Sensibilities inspired investigations around sounds and listening, enabling a relatively extensive empirical production, mapped by Alain Corbin (2016). In English-speaking countries, the accumulation of empirical research and theoretical reflections allowed, for example, the recognition of an 'Aural History,' which seeks to understand not only the sounds of the past and their production technologies but also their meanings to the people who listened to them (THOMPSON, 2015, p. 92). Among Anglophone productions, there are also significant narratives that aim to trace the history of sounds and listening, at least in Western Europe and North America (SMITH, 2007; EARLMANN, 2010), a theme also present in German-language production (JÜTTE, 2005 [2000]). In Brazil, although several professional historians have dedicated themselves to investigating the sounds and listenings of the past (APROBATO FILHO, 2008 and 2022; BESSA, 2010; PÉREZ GONZÁLEZ, 2018, MORAES, 2018 and 2021, OLIVEIRA, 2020, to name just a few studies), the theme is only now beginning to establish itself as a field, which still lacks comprehensive works.

and “epistemology,” he coined the term “acoustemology.” He used it to “understand how the production of and listening to sound (which includes music) can be a tool for the production of knowledge, relations between humans and non-humans, and their interactions with the broader environment” (BRITO, 2019). However, it was the technological advancements of the digital age that were primarily responsible for the acoustic turn that marked the Humanities.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, with the advent of phonography allowing the audible recording of sounds onto physical media,¹¹ new practices emerged. These included private and individual musical listening, the saving of the “voices of the dead” as a way of preserving heritage, and the development of new listening techniques,¹² among others. In turn, the dematerialization of these same recordings, driven by the increasingly widespread digital technologies since the 1990s, fostered new investigative attitudes. This occurred because such abilities as retrieving, cleaning, decomposing, modifying, and sharing a multitude of sound files greatly expanded the reflection on sound in modern societies. By the turn of the 2000s, a growing interest in the historical and socio-political aspects of sound reproduction led to the emergence of the field termed Sound Studies (IAZZETTA, 2015), with Jonathan Sterne (2003) being one of its early systematizers. Aiming to “imagine sound as a problem that moves beyond its immediate empirical context” and link its history with “the broader projects of the Humanities” (STERNE, 2020 [2003], p. 6), Sound Studies impacted various disciplines, from Sociology to Musicology. In particular for historiography, they introduced new objects and approaches among other features.¹³ Initially, however, researchers in this field were interested in the listening universe of a relatively elitist and restricted group. Introducing a

¹¹ There are countless non-audible records of sounds that preceded the advent of phonography. These range from onomatopoeias or the earliest forms of musical notation, which emerged over four thousand years ago, to more recent forms of visual recording of sound waves, such as the phonautograph (on this subject, see STERNE, 2003, Chapter 1).

¹² By ‘audile techniques,’ sound scholar Jonathan Sterne (2003) understands forms of listening that highlight certain sounds, attributing meaning to them, and abstract others, considered noise or simply ignored. It is evident, for example, in the medical use of the stethoscope from the beginning of the 19th century; in the auditory operation of telegraphs, which allowed telegraph operators, in a room full of devices emitting sound signals, to distinguish the sound of their machine from others; or even in the listening of a record, which requires the listener to abstract the “hiss” from the musically or meaningfully significant sound.

¹³ In a way, this History Journal signaled this turn when another dossier, organized in 2007, problematized the presence of sounds in the work of the professional historian (MORAES, 2007). Although the publication had as its title and focus the closer relationships between History and Music, its interdisciplinary composition allowed for the expansion of discussions related to the sonorities of the past and their listening.

new perspective, Ana Maria Ochoa made significant strides by leveraging a certain notion of “aurality” to understand the construction of ideas about the nature and culture of sound in the Latin American context. Drawing on historical-documentary research, she delved into the realm of historical anthropology to reflect on the interplay between knowledge, listening, and writing in 19th-century colonial Colombia (OCHOA GAUTIER, 2014).¹⁴

In the specific field of History, the increasing expansion and facilitation of access to sound archives through the digitization and online availability of recordings that were rarely consulted in their original analog formats, such as cylinders, 78 RPM discs, LPs, magnetic tapes, unveiled a new and promising realm of research. Granted, a history of phonography already existed prior to this,¹⁵ but it was motivated by the history of musicians and was more concerned with phonographic objects, their production, and commercialization, rather than the sound itself. And since access to the listening of these objects was limited, this historiography did not pose questions about their impact on listening habits and the way people related to the auditory world. In addition to simplifying the manipulation, editing, and comparison of numerous and varied phonogram collections, digital sound archives also transformed the modes of dissemination and preservation of these collections, thus influencing the construction of aural and musical memories, and consequently, narratives about the sounds of the past (MACHADO, 2015).

However, the initial enchantment caused by the expanded and facilitated access to sound sources is countered by at least two fundamental historiographical issues. First, recorded sound can only be used as a source for periods following the 1870s. While the phonogram is a key object for understanding the so-called “aural modernity” that began well before the phonograph’s advent,¹⁶ it’s not very useful for understanding the sounds and listenings of such societies like pre-modern ones, or

¹⁴ In the Latin American context and from an interdisciplinary approach, anthropologist Ana Lidia Domínguez Ruiz coordinates the “Network of Studies on Sound and Listening” (“Red de estudios sobre el sonido y la escucha”). From the work of this network, initiatives emerged such as the dossier “Listening Modes” (“Modos de escucha”) in the journal “The Thinking Ear” (“El oído pensante”) in 2019, and the course “From the Audible to the Aural: The Sonic Turn in Social Sciences” (“De lo audible a lo aural: el giro sonoro en las Ciencias Sociales”) taught at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in 2020.

¹⁵ In the Brazilian context, we can cite the pioneering works of Humberto Franceschi (1984) and João Carlos D’Ávila Paixão Cortés (1984). In the international context, we can reference works such as those by Pekka Gronow (1996, 1998).

¹⁶ According to Sterne, the transformations in the way modern societies listen are not the result of the advent of phonography. On the contrary, the invention of the phonograph was only possible due to the changes in the way of listening and conceiving sound from the mid-18th century onwards. “Just as there was an Enlightenment,” the author asserts, “there was also a ‘Sonorism.’ A conjunction of ideas,

for sound practices ill-suited for phonographic recording, such as everyday sounds, sounds of nature,¹⁷ noises, speech, and shouts (MORAES, 2018). Even so, as we'll explore later, recent historiography has developed conceptual and epistemological methods to study sounds that weren't mechanically recorded or those far removed from traditional written notation.¹⁸

The second historiographical problem related to the historicity of recorded sound lies in the fact that, although we can experience an audible past through phonography, "we can do no more than presume the existence of an auditory past" (STERNE, 2020 [2003], p. 25). In other words, the records bring to us sounds captured in the past, but they offer little information on how these sounds were perceived, signified, ranked, and interpreted. They do not allow us to know how people heard them. This limitation necessarily leads to discussions around the so-called sensory history or the History of Sensibilities, which decades before the advent of Sound Studies was already concerned in various ways with the historicity of sounds and listening.

In his 1990 article entitled "Sensory History and Anthropology", Alain Corbin argued that a history of sensibility would involve "detecting the configuration of what is and what cannot be experienced within a culture at a given historical moment" (CORBIN, 1990, p. 14). Among such experiences, listening and sound production certainly stand out – a topic that the French historian was just beginning to delve into, and which would become the core of a groundbreaking work released a few years later (CORBIN, 1994).¹⁹ The article also mapped the pitfalls and challenges faced by historians interested in venturing into the realm of the senses. The first of these, as always, is the positivist – and to some extent naive – temptation to want to reconstruct the evolution of the sensory environment. In the realm of sound, this inclination might lead to, for instance, creating inventories of sounds audible at

institutions, and practices made it possible for the world to be heard in new ways and valued new constructions of hearing and listening." (STERNE, 2020 [2003], p. 3).

¹⁷ Recent debates surrounding geophonies and biophonies and their recordings have notably increased, however. Pioneers in the field, Steven Feld (1982) and Bernie Krause (2013), maintain websites where one can listen to their experiences with nature recordings.

¹⁸ As just an example, recognized professional historians have ventured into this pre-phonographic sonic universe, such as CORBIN, 1994; FARGE, 2009; DARTON, 2014. Regarding medieval and ancient sounds, see OFFENSTADT, 1998; ALEXANDRE-BIDON, 2012; EMERIT, PERROT, and VINCENT, 2015; VINCENT, 2016; PANCER, 2017; SCHMITT, 2020, among many others. In the Brazilian context, notable examples are the research of APROBATO FILHO on urban sounds (2008) or animal sounds (2022), and MORAES on the sounds of coffee shops, confectioneries, bars, and taverns (2021).

¹⁹ Still without a Portuguese translation, the book *Les cloches de la terre. Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIXe siècle* deals with the transformations in the sonic landscape of the countryside in 19th-century France, driven by the uses, meanings, prohibitions, re-elaborations, and material transformations of bells and their chimes.

a specific time or location. As useful and alluring as this might be, offering a sort of imaginative immersion into the auditory universe of other times, this endeavor (conducted, for example, in the historical account proposed by Murray Schafer (2003 [1997]) in “The Tuning of the World”) would end up denying the historicity of listening modalities, the meaning of sounds, and the cultural and temporal boundaries between what’s tolerable and intolerable. As if what separated the contemporary sonic environment from those of the past was only the quality and quantity of sounds, and not the balance of the senses – the true object, according to Corbin, of the historian of sensibility.

The second complication would be confusing the actual employment of senses with the representation of these uses as decreed by contemporary observers. To cite a Brazilian example, it would be like deducing, based on theater chronicles from the early 20th century, that the noisy and popular gallery audience, as described in the press of the time, opposed a silent, restrained, almost inert audience. It’s worth noting that an authentic sensory education was undertaken among the elites throughout the second half of the 19th century in favor of silence (GAY, 1999), which probably fostered the development of an auditory technique that captured sounds from the audience based on the social origin of their sources. The truth is that sounds produced by elites situated in the most prestigious seats in theaters (comments, coughs, applause, or even boos) were not perceived as noise by contemporaries and, therefore, were neither condemned nor even mentioned in accounts of the time. From these stems another risk faced by the historian of the senses: confusing the unspoken with the unexperienced. If the sound of cars is increasingly absent from contemporary descriptions of large cities, it will probably be challenging to discern in the future whether it went unnoticed or if its ubiquity simply “naturalized” it to the point of no longer being mentioned. Similarly, Corbin suggests that certain taboos around describing experiences tied to bodily pleasure, taste, scents, and noises could lead to the false impression of the primacy of the visual, which was less off-limits.

After more than thirty years, the questions raised by the French historian remain current, especially for those who analyze the sound universe of the past through verbal accounts. In close dialogue with the History of Sensibilities, the article that opens this collection delves into the issue of memory and sound heritage. By analyzing how old residents and workers of the municipality of Rio Grande, RS, recall the extinct sounds of two textile industries in the city, Rheingantz and Ítalo-Brasileira, authors Olivia Nery and Maria Leticia Ferreira highlight the role of sounds in the construction of memory and identity by citizens. The factory whistle was central in shaping the daily memories not only of the workers but of the general inhabitants of Rio Grande. Other evocative sounds included the “clatter of clogs”

worn by female workers on their morning commute—sounds that touched the emotional imagination of many city residents, the diverse accents of factory workers, the relentless noise of machines, and the piercing siren activated during work accidents. Together, these elements vividly recall a not-so-distant past, spanning the 1950s to the 1970s. It's impossible not to recall the similarities of this dynamic in Rio Grande with the memories of Professor José de Souza Martins. In a kind of ego-history, he produced a piercing sociological analysis based on the recollection of the time he was a worker in the city of São Caetano do Sul, whose “factory whistles and bell tolls” regulated the sounds of suburban life in São Paulo, thus contributing to form a kind of soundscape related to the working world beyond regional limits (MARTINS, 2008). Although the authors use the notion of soundscape, formulated by Canadian researcher Murray Schafer to refer to the “general acoustic environment of a society” (SCHAFER, 2011 [1977], p. 23), they do not yield to the empiricist temptation of “discerning the evolution of the sensory environment” of a time or place (CORBIN, 1990). In a way, they seek to escape the abusive uses of the concept, which for a while became an explanatory and analytical elixir of the sound universe in social sciences, a method already criticized by ethnomusicologist Luc Charles-Dominique (2013), anthropologist Tim Ingold (2015 [2011]), and historian Emily Thompson (2002), among others. After all, the authors seek to understand the “sensory heritage” (SIMMONOT and SIRET, 2014) formed by the memory of ephemeral experiences, stimuli, and sensations which, although intangible, constitute a socially shared universe. Without ignoring that memory is interpretation and an “always problematic reconstruction of the past”, as Halbwachs (1990 [1968]) pointed out, they emphasize its function as an element of cohesion and identity.

The next four articles in this collection address the relationship between phonography and historical processes of various natures from different perspectives. The study of technologies and their transformations has the ability to present processes and social relations that were previously taken for granted, which might explain the current prominence of recorded sound among scholars interested in the sounds of the past.²⁰ It's worth noting that in the field of Visual Culture, works focusing on the history of photography and the photographic image initially absorbed the theoretical-conceptual issues of the image most effectively. These works invested more in documentation, producing databases, many of which were digi-

²⁰ Such preponderance is not exclusive to this dossier and can be noticed in other publications that explore the relationship between History and Sound Culture. In the issue of the journal “*Sociétés et Représentations*” dedicated to sounds and sound cultures, for example, five out of the nine articles deal with sound mediated by reproduction technologies.

tized. Furthermore, they exhibited greater sensitivity to the social and historical dimensions of problems posed by image reproduction techniques (MENESES, 2003, p. 21). It's not surprising that the same phenomenon occurs in the field of Sound Culture with recorded sound, which is used not only as a source of information about past sounds but also as a model for new ways of listening and as an active factor in listening regimes.

When analyzing a set of political records produced in France throughout the 20th century, Jonathan Thomas suggests that they acted as “fluid mediators” of different political cultures, which allowed them not only to infiltrate opposing political cultures but also to occupy certain unexpected social spaces. According to the author, this characteristic was not limited to explicit political propaganda records (those intended to explicitly mobilize listeners through militant speeches), but was also present in music records (which promote a certain aestheticization of politics) or in so-called historical records (which gather testimonials or period recordings). This media fluidity of the record became possible only due to a particular imaginary built around recorded sound. In this context, sound was perceived as an agent of truth, serving both as a sample of reality and as factual evidence. This promise of truth offered by records is identified by Thomas as the “truthful imaginary” of recorded sound.

The author draws attention to the fact that Thomas Edison, when predicting the initial uses of his invention, conceived the phonograph as a technology of reproduction rather than one of creation and aestheticization of sounds. Indeed, even before the advent of phonography, a number of sound reproduction technologies already allowed for the same sequence of sounds (generally musical) to be mechanically and identically reproduced, as in the cases of the barrel organ or the player piano. However, although these devices enabled exact sound replication, they were not perceived as reproducers, but rather as simple generators of replicable sounds. It was only with the phonograph that the idea (or rather the ideology) emerged that sound could be “separated” from its source and reproduced identically in another context, giving rise to an “original” sound and its “copies.” This relates to what electroacoustic musicians later termed “acousmatic” and what Murray Schafer (2011 [1977]) described as “schizophonia”, concepts problematized by Sterne (2003, Chapter 5). Thomas draws on Sterne's ideas to unveil the political uses of the naturalistic character of recorded sound, which would possess “the ability, derived from its imaginary qualities, to permeate all social spaces, despite potential restrictions on the circulation of the meanings it carries.”

In the following article, Laura Jordán presents a critical analysis of some Chilean music productions made between the 1950s and 1980s by the American labels Folkways, Monitor, and Paredon, all belonging to the Smithsonian Institution cata-

log. Based on the translations of the texts that accompanied the LPs, the author questions the discursive strategies used to present these musics as “authentic,” raising doubts about the negligent handling of the collected information and its relationship to the recorded sounds. The article emphasizes the role of international phonographic dissemination in shaping listeners who are able to appreciate sounds that were initially unknown or distant to them. Jordán’s analysis reveals that the record companies used the translation of the inserts to activate various “acoustic filters,” shaped by imaginaries rooted in the listeners’ culture. Thus, their listening experience would be mediated more by elements close to their own expectations than by an understanding of the circumstances in which those musics emerged. The study suggests that auditory perception can be conditioned by power structures and, in this sense, demonstrates how American record labels, following their own commercial and political agendas, translated the sounds of Chile into categories familiar to the international audience, either through exoticism and authenticity or through political engagement. Although it focuses on Chilean music, the article serves as a source of inspiration for researchers interested in music from other regions that were also turned into phonographic products. Given that the same labels (and perhaps using criteria very similar to those highlighted by the author) recorded music from various places on the planet in their collections, Jordán’s text offers methodological guidelines for analyzing how these musics were presented to listeners far removed from the original contexts of their production and use.

Still within the realm of the phonographic industry, Maya Suemi Lemos and Pedro Aragão analyze the sonic representations of Brazilian ethnic-racial groups disseminated in 78 RPM records recorded by black singers, instrumentalists, and composers in the first four decades of the 20th century. The authors seek to analyze the process by which Brazilian black populations were understood as an “internal other” in the post-abolition context, which contrasted with the modern identity that the country was forging for itself. To this end, they use the notion of “sonic color line,” coined by Jeniffer Stoeve (2016) to designate the sonic strategies used in the ideological demarcation between whites and blacks in the United States, carefully shifting it to the Brazilian context. Moving away from studies interested in the sounds themselves, their (re)production technologies, and the ideologies underlying them, the authors present the political and ideological dimensions of the social uses of sound, more specifically in the construction of what they call “sonic racialities,” which identify certain vocal timbres, accents, or musical sounds with racialized bodies. They discuss how sonic-musical representation strategies of alterity, devised since the 19th century in literomusical records such as the lundu, are redefined and amplified in the phonographic universe.

In the last article of the dossier, Bruno Tavares examines the 18 phonograms featured in the first volume of the publication “500 Years of Brazilian Popular Music” (*500 anos da música popular brasileira*), a commemorative CD-book published by the Museum of Image and Sound in Rio de Janeiro (MIS-RJ) in 2001. Alongside the texts that make up the publication, the original audio selection suggests a narrative about the five centuries of Brazilian Popular Music, where sound documents appear merely as an illustration of a history centered on composers, performers, and works. In his analysis, Tavares shifts the focus from the repertoire and musicians to the sound technicians – the mixer men – responsible for the recordings. Historically, phonography has strived to conceal the complex technical resources that imparted a particular sound to recordings of a given era. The intent was to render them unnoticed by the listener, creating a sense of fidelity and closeness to the live listening experience. To achieve this “illusion of reality,” it was necessary to keep technical resources under wraps and even shrouded in some secrecy, thus cultivating a listening experience largely inattentive to recording techniques. By revealing these resources, Bruno Tavares underscores the impact of studio professionals’ choices on the final sound outcome presented in the MIS-RJ publication. Sergio Ospina had already identified something similar in the mechanical recording practices carried out by the technicians of the Victor Talking Machine Company in Latin America and the Caribbean during the first two decades of the 20th century. Just as Tavares suggests for the early 21st century, the sound technicians of Victor also did not intend to showcase the workings of the machines and their practices, thereby creating a certain aura of mystery about the technology used (OSPINA, 2019; 2021, and LOPES, 2021).²¹ Besides the technical features of the historical recordings used in the CD, the author draws attention to the adaptations and adjustments made to tracks specifically produced for the publication, to conform them to the listening standards of the early 21st century. Through this analysis, Tavares unveils an important aspect of our sound culture during the transition from the 20th to the 21st century: the tendency to disregard certain sound layers present in phonograms, such as reverb effects, volumes associated with the distances between instruments and microphone(s), editing and cuts in production, “cleaning” of sound during the digitization of 78 RPM records, and so on. However, these layers play a pivotal role

²¹ Sergio Ospina Romero presented some of these ideas in his doctoral thesis (2019). They were later elaborated on in the lecture “Acoustic Listening and Mechanical Recording in Itinerant Studios (1901-1925)” given in 2021, at the invitation of the Laboratory for Music and Sound Studies (LEMS) from the Institute of Arts of Unicamp. Ospina’s presentation was reviewed by Henrique Masera Lopes, with the text available online (LOPES, 2021).

in the acoustic character unconsciously perceived by the modern listener. In a way, therefore, there is an ultimate concern with the technical impacts of “music in the brain,” a subject of interest in Levitin’s studies (2010 [2006]), who was originally a sound engineer.

In addition to the articles, the dossier also features an intriguing interview with French researcher Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux. A specialist in Theatrical Studies, she dedicates a significant portion of her research to examining the role of the audience in theatrical performances, which are always noisy. In recent years, however, she has shifted her focus to the sonic aspects of theatrical art, aspects that for a long time were overlooked by scholars in the field. Starting from the understanding of the theater as a “place where one listens,” her research examines everything from the acoustics of halls to the role of accents in theatrical performances, proposing an acoustic and sonic history of the theater. Drawing close to both the History of Sensibilities and Sound Studies, Mervant-Roux believes that a convergence and complementarity between Francophone and Anglophone studies are necessary for a better understanding of the studies of past sounds. She and her team also want to share of their research, disseminating their findings to the general public through blogs and podcasts that explore the sonic elements of theater and propose listening exercises.

Three reviews contribute to broadening the discussions presented in the articles of this dossier. The works examined exemplify some of the main trends in the field of Sound Culture. Published in 2023, “Earshot: Perspectives on Sound” by Australian researcher Bruce Johnson, synthesizes some of the main issues raised in recent decades by the Anglophone current of Sound Studies. Johnson is a musician, researcher, and author of dozens of works on jazz, sound history, and film music. In this book, he revisits themes and problems related to the relationships between sounds, memory, modernity, and power formulated throughout his career. On the other hand, Alain Corbin’s “History of Silence” is more interested in the interpretation of subjective sensory experiences than in theorizations. It extends the Francophone tradition of the History of Sensibilities. Originally published in French in 2016 and translated into Portuguese in 2021, the work continues and deepens his investigations around the history of the sensible world, shifting the focus, previously explored by the author in other works, from perceptions and representations of sounds from the past towards silence, its uses, and meanings. Representing the Latin American trends in sound studies, “Vibrant cities: sound and urban aural experience in Latin America” (*Ciudades vibrantes: sonido y experiencia aural urbana en América Latina*), a collective work published in 2020 under the direction of Mexican musicologist Natalia Bieletto, uses the previously mentioned notion of aurality to address the audible social practices in Latin American cities. With a strongly inter-

disciplinary perspective, including contributions from ethnomusicologists, musicians, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, musicologists, and communication scholars, the work seeks to reflect on the specificities of Latin America's musical and sonic experiences without confining itself to traditional perspectives and epistemologies.

As discussed in this introductory text, studying the listening practices and sounds of the past in a way presupposes silently delving into the aural world, which has its own historicity and intricacies. With some poetic license, the writer Oswald de Andrade can help summarize this discussion. In one of his works, he used his modernist acuity and critical sense to comment, "We write what we hear, never what's here."²² This witty remark insightfully reflects the historian's endeavor to explore Sound Culture, the practices and challenges of which are detailed in this dossier. While the historiographical tradition for a long-time produced knowledge relatively deaf to sounds, focusing much more on "what's here," investigations into sensibilities are interested in how we listen and stop listening, the interests with which we do it, and the reasons we fall silent. Thus, perhaps the historian concerned with the sounds of the past should walk (in the Oswaldian way) on the fine line between what's "here" and what and how we "hear."

²² The article *Objeto e fim da presente obra*, which Oswald wrote about his novel *Serafim Ponte Grande*, was originally published in *Revista Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, year I, n. 6, p. 5, on November 30, 1926. It was republished in ANDRADE, 2022 [1933].

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All the audio records referenced in the **History and Sound Cultures Dossier** can be listened to at: <http://www.memoriadamusica.com.br/site/index.php/texto-e-audio/15-texto-e-audio/498-dossie-historia-e-cultura-sonoras-revista-historia-sao-paulo-n-182-2023>

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