

Introduction

BOLA'S INVITATION: DETAILS TO FOLLOW

Piano keys are gently pressed. You listen along as the player's hands begin to wander the instrument. The invitational and intimate notes signal the not-quite beginning of a show. It is a music of preparation, not a demonstration of mastery over an instrument. The sound is open, hospitable, and warm. You are not sure what direction it will go, or where you, the listener, will end up. The notes affect your stride; add gusto to your gestures. Your timing is adjusted. For the performer who is playing, the music helps to announce: I am not quite here and neither are you. The sound settles you in, not to discipline you into a model audience, but so you can pour another drink, hang your purse on the back of a chair, nod to someone in the room, get another kiss, make sure the signal is strong. You are given some time to find a place in the event as it begins.

What I begin to describe here is a moment from a performance by the Cuban composer and musician named Ignacio Villa, also known as Bola de Nieve. The nickname "Bola de Nieve" (Snowball) was offhandedly given to him by Rita Montaner, the great musical star of stage, radio, and screen as an ironic comment on his black skin and round face.¹ His intimate salon style of performing and queer charisma made him one of the most magnetic and beloved Cuban musicians of any century. He was as known for his live, late-night shows during midcentury Cuban nightlife as for his radio appearances

that aired throughout Latin America. The notes above initiate a salutation, a saludo that he delivered at the start of one of his radio programs in 1951. After we are invited into Villa's performance with those soft, porous notes, he folds his voice into the music by talking not over, or under, but alongside the piano as he plays. In an audible whisper, Villa invites us in with the following:

Buenas noches/ tengo mucho gusto de estar con ustedes/ para presentar una serie de canciones/ a mi manera,/ y con mi piano,/ digo, aunque no es mío, es de la radio./ Así que los voy a hacer sufrir, quién sabe, un poquito,/ pero con una gran placer y con una gran gana/ y una gran estima /de ustedes que son un público latinoamericano sobre todo/ y del mundo entero/ que me van a soportar un ratico./ Así que voy a empezar para ustedes con mis canciones.

Good evening/ I am so glad to be with you all this evening/to present a set of songs/ in my way,/ and with my piano,/ well, it's not exactly mine, it's the radio station's./ So I might make it suffer just a little bit/ but it is with great pleasure and great desire and great esteem that I'll play/ for you, who are mostly a Latin American public/ and of the entire world/ who will put up with me for a little bit./ So now I am going to start playing my songs for you.

In this talking prelude, Villa's crisp voice slips through a smile. The spoken phrases bleed into the thoughtful pauses he uses to separate them. While both the piano and voice are muffled, they burrow their way through the shoddy recording. His voice is high pitched and rubbed with gravel. A feathery wheeze pushes up the ends of his words. It soothes as much as it bewilders; a sophisticated vocal combination of the grandmotherly, the juvenescent, the amorous, and the erudite. It is the sound of the misfit and the life of the party. Villa's gift for modulating his distance from a microphone—at once far away and so close—would ensure his resurrection with every repeated play. This saludo, like his other recordings, puts him in the room.

As Villa offers this greeting alongside those indirect preparatory notes, the piano is not subjugated by the voice. Instead, it is its counterpoint: a musical line that will repeatedly press against his voice and then move away.



FIG. INTRO.1: Ignacio Villa also known as “Bola de Nieve,” album cover of *Bola de Nieve con su piano*, 1957.

The piano’s sounds are given room to retreat into other places so that they might, in their own way, rise and fall in scale and volume. Chords are gingerly yet decidedly played in their complete forms, until the final moment, when one is taken apart and scaled so that we hear what makes it whole. The piano underscores what he says and what he says underscores the piano. Through this introduction of both instrument and voice, Villa prepares you to hear something new, as if for the first time. And yet, you are instantaneously flooded by the memories of all those standards and lullabies you have heard from this voice and this piano—so instantly recognizable—up to this point. Your infancy and futurity mingle in the smoke-filled cabaret

quality of the recording. This ambient feel was well-practiced by Villa, who in his own method of receptive control and self-protection, would insist on performing late night sets to ensure that those in attendance were there to see and hear him.

Armando Suárez Cobián, the Cuban writer born in 1957 who came of age on the island during its revolution before arriving to New York City in 1992, introduced me to this recording in 2007.² He played it for a group of us in the after hours at his Brooklyn apartment, a refraction of the late-night tone of the recording. In the crowded room, you could sense Villa sitting alone with his piano in a dimly lit studio. The evening was one of the many occasions when Armando would give circuitous answers to my questions about growing up on the island. I can't recall exactly what we covered that night. I remember it in flashes: the cabin of his summer camp, the teacher that once lectured with a sword in hand, the childhood photograph of him dressed up as a cowboy. Together with Villa's recording, these details offered a composite of Cuban sound put together for one evening. The remainders and reminders of that evening—alongside many other details picked up before and after it—have shaped my interactions with music and with Cuba. I present them in these pages as acknowledgments of a past and present both mine and not mine, as opportunities for different interactions with history, and as invitations to listen in detail to your own surround.

To listen in detail calls into primary question the ways that music and the musical reflect—in flashes, moments, sounds—the colonial, racial, and geographic past and present of Cuba as much as the creative traditions that impact and impart from it. As I listen in detail to Villa's performance, I call attention to this past, present, and unheard future. Acknowledgment of Villa's interpretative technique, especially as he tweaks the conventions of an introductory remark, is always worth reiterating. Listen closer to how he compresses complex receptive worlds, sentiments, and performance trajectories in this recorded detail. Listening in detail ignores those accusations of going too far, of giving too much time to a recording of seemingly little significance. Listening in detail to Villa's performance makes it impossible to put both his sound and the creative traditions he indexes here at the service of instant allegory, to signify sweeping historical truths, or as a point of departure for more legible discourses about race and nation.

Villa's detail and detailed mode makes it similarly impossible for me to leave this powerful recording behind to talk more explicitly about what this book is "really about." His work establishes a few of the methods behind its writing and creates a listening environment for its reading. Villa reveals that an introduction can provide another function than a definitive mapping of the experience to follow. It can be an intimate collection of notes that signal the not-quite beginning of a show. His not-quite-here and neither-are-you ethos permits a variety of ways into the repertoire that follows. My introduction borrows Villa's inaugural model to offer a set of flexible and inviting coordinates that reveal the locations—musical, scholarly, and otherwise—that have made the writing of these pages possible, rather than predetermine an experience with them. It is not merely Villa's play with the formal convention of an introduction that I hope to approximate here. His saludo is a structuring sound and feeling for *Listening in Detail*.

In the structuring sound and feeling of this recording, I hear intricate approaches to performance offered in just one minute. One approach modeled here involves Villa's framing of his own oeuvre. To say that this introduction is merely an exercise in self-deprecation coming from one of the island's most esteemed performers would be too easy. While self-deprecation might indeed be operative here, Villa's intention is always unknowable and should be. Instead, listen closer to the way that Villa sets up his repertoire with precise care, he will "present a set of songs/in my way." He is precise in his promise to the audience though he cases its delivery in open terms. In the saludo, Villa gives himself interpretive room by having a specificity of task. By describing this task, simply and plainly as "in his way," he is upfront about what you are about to hear is his temporary version of things.

It is through this detail, this saludo, which Villa provides an entry point to what we are about to hear and what is in excess of it. And he does so in a way that incorporates a vast spectrum of publics. We must remember that as he records this, his radio audiences are not known or revealed to him. As he announces his presence (but not quite), however, you hear him take inventory of his surroundings without missing a beat. There is something reassuring in this: you get the sense that wherever or whatever you're coming from will do just fine. His recourse to the universal "del mundo entero"

does not just toggle with the particular “un publico latinoamericano,” but the universal and the particular are allowed to lap into each other.

As you begin to get a sense of its intense spatial reach—the listening worlds incorporated here—also note his diminutive approach to the recording session. My evocation of the diminutive is not intended for disparaging ends. The apologetic diminutive used to curtail pomposity, the belittling diminutive of power, the diminutive-as-miniature and all of its nineteenth-century baggage, the violent diminutive of cutting something down to size, are not what I evoke here. This preamble offers a clear instance of the diminutive imperative in Cuban Spanish. While this tendency to alter words (what Severo Sarduy poetically called the “game of verbal deformation”) might have troublesome interpellative functions, diminutives—like nicknames—also shorthand objects of affection, those things that deserve our highest respect, what or whom we might love the most.³ I hear Villa’s diminutive imperative beyond the words he fragments or uses to diminish grand narratives of presence. He is going to make the piano suffer, “un poquito” (just a little bit). He asks that we put up with him for “un ratito” (just another little bit). His tenderness for the audience, instrument, repertoire, and occasion is carefully and lovingly detailed. This cultivation of an unassuming posture, one that an audience can choose to engage or reject, allows for a different way in to what you are about to hear.

Villa alters many things in this preamble. Note how he thwarts ownership over his actual instrument. That piano is “not exactly” his, and his repertoire, a set of songs he will perform “in his way.” The instrument is not some mute, unfeeling object, but something that might be made to suffer a little bit, which might be to say, played in ways it was never intended. Or perhaps it is another moment in a creative trajectory that has had a necessary and historical relationship to theft. In all, the instrument will both affect and be affected by Villa. And so will his publics whom he thanks ahead of time for also putting up with him for a little bit. This does not sound like false modesty, but an acknowledgment that there is something greater than his performance in the here and now. His audience can always be other places. The piano can be played other ways. He will sing other interpretations of the songs.

Villa is not considered a foundational figure in the typically circulated

canon of performance studies scholarship. He is among the countless details that disturb any attempt to make the field stable. In this saludo his precise but open task, refusal of grand claims, incorporation of different publics and voices, assumption that objects can never be mastered, and his knowledge that interpretation is infinite reveals an underground of performers and theorists that have and will continue to anticipate and alter a field that seeks to better describe and theorize the performance event. The field's institutional provenance sprung from a shared disenchantment with the limitations of traditional anthropology and theater studies and hoped to expand the methods and objects of study to diverse disciplinary locations and aesthetic forms.⁴ Although its early works continued to emphasize live theatrical events and ethnographically observed phenomena, there have been many scholars that have opened up the field to critical experiments in sound, visibility, space, and text.

What Villa does here—as many other performers and critics have done elsewhere—is to trouble the anthropological underpinnings of the field that presume that objects can be known. He suggests that critics can do a different kind of work should they change their assumptions about having direct access to performers. And finally, he helps me to underscore that every performance is an introduction and an invitation. It is by way of Villa's sound, diminutive cast, and creative play in this detail that I pick up an ethos for the critique of performance; an ethos I try and sustain throughout the book. This ethos bears a set of necessary protocols: one must be able to adjust to a different sense of time, be eager to go to unexpected places, remain open to being altered, ready to frame a project in the diminutive, and prepared to assume there is always some other way.

Such protocols are also vital for the writing of and about Cuba. Recall that there is another introduction at work here: my encounter with Villa's performed detail in Suárez Cobián's makeshift salon; an occasion where I heard a few island details both pleasurable and difficult. It was an occasion that offered a temporary version of Cuba that resisted an overdetermination of its whole. Totalizing attempts to define what and who Cuba is have long inspired possessive attachments to it. When approached through its details, and not via the overbearing bombast typical of any nationalism, Cuba offers creative furrows for being and belonging. Details of past experiences

form the source material that helps many of us to imagine Cuba, especially those of us who inherit our relationship to it. For children of immigrants, details from their parents' other lived locations are precarious things. They are openings that can be sought out, avoided, honored, rejected, and loved. The details are often all that is left behind from a near past. They remind us that that place is always partial, that we will never have a fullness of a past picture or sound. Details are things that we learn to live on, imagine off, and use to find other kinds of relationships to our parents' natal locations. To listen in detail is a different project than remembering. It is not archeological work done to reconstruct the past. It is to listen closely to and assemble that inherited lived matter that is both foreign and somehow familiar into something new. As Walter Benjamin once described, the imagination is "the capacity for interpolation into the smallest details."⁵

The circuitous spirit and elusive quality of details offer rich opportunities for making criticism a creative activity. It is the performances by Villa, Suárez Cobián, and many others both close and distant, and the detail opportunities they've left behind, that have informed my approach to Cuban music, the critical and creative delta that this book is about.

"Cuban music" is a most difficult and elusive sign that places *Listening in Detail* in the cavalcade of commodities that fails to deliver it as a complete and cohesive object. "Cuban music" or *la música cubana* attempts to condense a dynamic spectrum of practices into a singular entity. It is a term that is at once unwieldy and all-too-wieldy, both convenient and inconvenient. "Cuban music" struggles to contain the historical processes at stake in its formation, but it is also relied upon to fully incorporate and shorthand them.⁶ When speaking of the historical processes at stake in music, what we're really talking about is people: how they came to be a part of, what they contributed to, how they made it sound, and what directions they took it. As such, *la música cubana* has not only been deployed as an allegorical parallel to national becoming, but also has been often used as an interchangeable term for Cuba itself, whether deployed from above, below, within, and without.⁷ To wholly reject operating under such a sign—or to unbind it from Cuba—is a difficult and, one could argue, impossible exercise. We might not want to. Such a conflation can and has allowed a more expansive sense of Cuba by

insisting upon those historically unwanted bodies and all the sonic details they bear as part of it. And while the sign “Cuban music” has also been used as a repressive tool of inclusion and exclusion, those historically unwanted bodies and their sonic details always intervene in those terms of its delivery.

Listening in Detail is an interaction with, rather than a comprehensive account of, Cuban music. It necessarily presses against and moves away from how it has been packaged, circulated, and written about because “Cuban music” often mirrors how Cuba operates in the greater imaginary. By veering from the dominant narratives used to examine both Cuba and its music, I open up pathways to other sites and sounds that intervene in their discursive surfaces. I gesture to how the location of Cuban music is impossible to pinpoint, but it is nonetheless locatable. The definitive who of Cuban music is impossible to contain, but one can spend some time with a few people who have made contributions to it. As Guillermo Cabrera Infante once wrote, “La música, como el espíritu, sopla donde quiere” [Music, like the spirit, blows where it wants to].⁸

I follow Cuban music’s unpredictable currents and accompaniments rather than uphold, validate, or reject it as a sign, or to sanction what it signifies. By doing so, I heed the established traditions behind much of Cuban music to trouble a cohesive sense of Cuba and Cubanness, even as it is relied upon to determine both. This book is decidedly indefinite and not intended to be encyclopedic or reliable as a touristic guide. The critical instruments traditionally used to examine Cuban music (not exactly mine) might be made to suffer a little bit. There is no survey of epochs, verification of genre’s firsts, musical transcription, or excavation of what has been falsely described as lost. Music—if solely defined as “songs” and/or “praxis”—might be said to make a minor appearance here. But music—if understood as what is also in excess of “songs” and/or “praxis”—can, in fact, be heard from every object that preoccupies these pages.

To borrow Villa’s phrasing, I am going to present a set of songs in my way. By which I partly mean to consider how music presents itself to analysis. I keep an ear out for what is incorporated by but also interrupts a musical event: those detailed disruptions might slip by undetected but they have an undeniable impact on the whole. A grunt that keeps the song in time, an aside during a performance, filmic flashes and other intangible but felt mi-

nutiae, all uniquely animate the work in these pages. I also stretch the limits of what is typically enclosed by “music” to include other ephemera whose audibility might at first be difficult to discern.⁹ For example, the sound made by texts, oral histories, and other forms of documentation, be they written, filmed, and danced. Through careful attention to those details nestled in alternative locations and histories, *Listening in Detail* offers a different set of scenarios through which Cuban music might be experienced.

I once again lean on the instructive words of Bola de Nieve: to those readers willing to put up with me for just a little bit, I will start playing my songs for you. For the remainder of this introduction—my saludo—I move through some concerns that animate the book and the critical modes that arise by way of them. By outlining a set of historical, aesthetic, and disciplinary precedents, an outlining that also allows for their later undoing, I encourage the reader to find their own place in the book as it begins.

THE GUIDING OF CUBAN MUSIC

While the narration of Cuban music—particularly in guide form—has taken place over several centuries, it is hard not to notice its proliferation in albums and texts since the mid-1990s.¹⁰ Sequestered “World Music” sections in chain bookstores and (now defunct) record stores, seemed to suddenly overflow with commodities that promised authentic entry points into the music. The *Buena Vista Social Club*, being the most famous and fatigued example, took up considerable room but was far from alone in reinserting a particular version of Cuba in the global consumer cultural market.¹¹ It found counterparts in other artifacts circulated by mostly North American and European record labels. Taken together, their packaging collectively pined for the island’s colonial past in addition to its cold war present and did much to renew fantasies of Cuba as a place outside of modernity and ready for excavation.¹² In the liner notes of *Buena Vista Social Club*, producer Ry Cooder writes, “The players and singers of the ‘son de Cuba’ have nurtured this very refined and deeply funky music in an atmosphere sealed off from the fall out of a hyperorganised and noisy world.” Denying Cuba’s active place in the here-and-now and the right of its own order, such sealing off dangerously participates in a tripartite set of presumptions. The idea of Cuba’s isolation

finds precedent in other written impressions of the island at the turn of the nineteenth century, and especially, the conquistadores who overtook it in the fifteenth century.¹³ Both made it discursively ripe for conquest. Such sealing off falsely promotes the idea that Cuban musical influence has stayed within its geographical borders. And of the third assumption, it must be asked: when has Cuba ever been quiet?

Old cars, cigars, elderly black men sitting on old cars and smoking cigars, mulatas in miniskirts—usually but not always soaked in sepiá—are common visual themes found on these albums and books. A handbook such as Philip Sweeney's *The Rough Guide to Cuban Music* is indicative of the many guides published in the *Buena Vista* aftermath as travel to the island by European and Canadian tourists became not only commonplace, but also made the island a tropicalized notch on many a traveler's bucket list. These trips were taken with a fevered urgency "before Castro died" and "before it changed" and "before Miami could take over." Like the faux-yellowed photographs used to capture the Cuban communistic paradise, such urgency helped to craft Cuba as a fixed, immobile, and nonchanging object. There is always a temporal abbreviation that guarantees quick, if not painless, consumption of Cuban music in these objects. They depend upon Cuba *as* time standing still—but its contents must nevertheless keep a syncopated beat.

To deny Cuba a history and futurity—a denial profoundly enacted in the consumption and circulation of its musical objects—is to participate in the fantasy that Cuba can be known fully and known quickly. These albums and guides are often made to replicate a traveler's journey and/or a journey through history organized by genre. With these taxonomies in place, quickly abbreviated discussions on the racial origins of the musics are perpetually repeated with little nuance or research. These kinds of objects that emerge in the 1990s and onward are far from novelties in the larger circulated ideas about Cuba and its music. They all hope to answer the market demand that the world has long made of Cuba: be accessible and available. This demand continues in spite, and it could be argued because of, the half-century embargo of Cuba by the United States and the untold psychic and material damage it has caused. In addition to being the go-to ideological instrument for both nations, the embargo continues to elevate Cuba's forbidden appeal to tourists.¹⁴ It must be admitted that such albums and guides—no matter

how fraught or provocative or thoughtful—is how many come to hear contemporary Cuba, particularly as recordings of Cuban musicians both past and present have been difficult to come by.

I confess having long been seduced by the fight against the guiding of Cuban music as outlined in the above. Such seduction was cut short, many years ago, when a wise teacher asked me: “But what do the musicians actually *sound* like?”¹⁵ In other words, to not listen to what the performers are doing—regardless of how they were packaged and traded on and off the island—would be to enact another kind of violence upon them. Throughout *Listening in Detail*, the kinds of critiques I make in the above are always on the mind, but I insist on an ethical and intellectual obligation to the question: what do the musicians *sound* like? To reduce my discussion of the music and the musicians to those argumentative frames, however critically, would promote a kind of listening that easily collaborates with the sealing off of the island from the fundamental place it has in music specifically, and creativity more generally.

How then to approach and write under the sign of Cuban music with all its difficult, uncontained, and uncontainable history? There are many kinds of precedents. More than a few authors have remarked on the impossibility of analyzing the totality of Cuban music even as their work operates under the sign of it. In the rest of this section, I turn to two other saludos—introductions from textual guides—that reveal and revel in the difficulties of writing about Cuban music. They offer alternative models to the guides above, particularly in their shared refusal to become definitive monoliths. The first example in 1939 is by the Cuban composer and musicologist Emilio Grenet who illustrates some of the failures that can occur in a project on music based on genre. However, his inviting failures do not only help me to gesture to more of the methodological complexities behind such an effort, they also inspire movement into other modes of investigation. The second in 1983 is by Natalio Galán, another Cuban composer and musicologist who does much to approximate Villa’s approach to repertoire in critical form.¹⁶

DISTRIBUCIÓN GRATUITA. “Free distribution” reads a hand-pressed stamp on an original library copy of Emilio Grenet’s *Popular Cuban Music: 80 Revised and Corrected Compositions*. Grenet’s opus was written, published, and disseminated in English and Spanish versions in 1939—eight

years after a shark attack left the author with one leg and arm less. In an odd twist on state-sanctioned commissions, the Cuban government's Department of Agriculture had enlisted Grenet to write this instructive study of popular Cuban music. He was the likely figure for the job. Not only did Grenet come from one of Cuba's most notorious musical families, but he also lived a double occupational life as both music critic and composer.¹⁷ His dexterousness inevitably facilitated the diptych form of the text. The first section is comprised of a scholarly essay that attempts to describe (and textually contain) the development of Cuban music in a series of titled sections. As supplement to these pedagogical missives, Grenet includes a set of eighty musical scores that he transcribed, fake book style, from a selected group of significant Cuban composers.

The text was provided free of charge to libraries and universities, in the secretary of agriculture's words, for the "diffusion of our [Cuban] culture."¹⁸ More a pamphlet in character if not actual form, the text's entry onto the international stage betrays a set of vexed national quandaries. Given its commissary conditions, the book links music and sugar as the island's vital commodities for export. Like sugar, the music within must seek out and lay claim to markets beyond its domestic shores. This export could potentially plant the seeds for the subsequent import of foreign capital. In this sense, Grenet's instructive book superficially masquerades as a lure for Cuban musical tourism—with all the attendant tropical, erotic, and exotic objects that might be heard and consumed there—for North American and Peninsular Spanish publics.¹⁹ The book attempts to control, however, the visitation rights extended to outsiders. The little Spanish señorita dancing a rumba with requisite sombrero that had determined and captivated Cuban music's increasingly internationalized audience had exhausted Grenet. In order to set certain records straight, he insists upon a few insights, whether you were to visit the island physically or experience it from afar. For Grenet, part of this erudition recognizes "the pathos of the soul which gave it origin."²⁰

Popular Cuban Music renders the wondrous mess that is its object of study as something that can be known through the organization of its multifarious data. Grenet resorts to categories to make rational the irrational, to bring transparency to the opaque, and to erect order from the disorder.²¹ For example, in the large section titled "Genres of Cuban Music," Grenet

attempts to construct a reliable taxonomy by charting genres as separate sections with racialized headings: “Genres Bordering on the Spanish,” “Genres of Equitable Black and White Influence,” and “Genres Bordering on the African.”²² Genre always constructs its own hierarchical order.²³ The Indigenous/African/Spaniard triad, commonly (and chronologically) deployed as such to explain Cuba, makes the histories—and the many details that haunt them—of genocide, slavery, and European colonization to be quickly checked off without careful consideration of their residual aftermaths.²⁴ At the same time that Grenet wields his corrective text, he paradoxically provides the instruments that allow for Cuba’s problematic consumption. Grenet’s taxonomy, which figure genre and race in tandem, reproduces a user-friendly version of Cuba and its music is made palpable for the international sphere. Nevertheless, to deny the paradoxical slant to Grenet’s text—as an object that hopes to capture, but can’t, what Cuban music is—would be to deny those forces that have guided and misguided any project about Cuba since its conquest.

There is thus an instructive failure about this book in spite of its ambitious aim in scope. It would be a grave error to presume that Grenet was somehow unconscious of its failures. His awareness is particularly revealing through the use of the word “bordering” when trying to categorize race according to genre (and vice versa). “Bordering” does much to disrupt the sanitized rhetoric of inheritance regarding the nation’s ancestry and cultures. The beginnings and endings of one group of people bleed over and onto one another. It would be of further disservice to Grenet to consider his word choice as yet another variant term interchangeable for *mestizaje*. His coinage more likely signals the concept’s ambivalences and multiple meanings, for “bordering” reads more as tentative shorthand and less like an overarching theory.²⁵ Instead, Grenet conjures a disjunctive, overlapping, and somewhat elusive musical space. His usage admits the infringements and permissions, the negotiations and restrictions, the possibilities and closures that occur on these musical borders.

As Grenet and musicians from all eras have taught us, no matter how much you try and ossify genre, it will always offer tools for its own undoing. I am interested in how Grenet writes *about* genre rather than how he defines it. Note how he peremptorily unraveled his own system by the use of the

word “bordering” to soften his rigid categoricals. And then there is the following detail that conspires to leave behind a powerful cultural manifesto for the contemporary Americas of past and present. The quote is featured on the first page of his text under “Subject of the Work”:

It should be made known—and this we repeat is the underlying purpose of this work—that what is now presented to the jaded European taste, avid for new stimuli as something new, capable of providing new thrills, is not something which has been improvised as a tourist attraction, but a spiritual achievement of a people that has struggled during four centuries to find a medium of expression. (ix)

His evocation of four centuries is not only a clue to his (and the music’s) conditions of production, but also those factors placed upon Cuban musical commodities in the global market. Written in 1939, this passage demonstrates that the reception and circulation of Cuban popular music has long been fraught with discourses of discovery. The author calls out the current and predicts the future proliferation of Cuban music and musicians that are packaged as “new” undiscovered material, yet who are also described as “stuck in time.” Grenet’s brief manifesto here suggests that the “spiritual achievement” of Cuban music is not a finite one. Rather, it resonates the always already unfinished project of self-definition. Grenet’s presentation and analysis of musical genres, that for which the text is commonly cited and taken to task for, informs my book insofar that it recognizes, but ultimately rejects a genre-centered program.²⁶ From Grenet, I take the writing about four centuries of “spiritual achievement,” as a necessary responsibility that must be taken up by many. I am also made aware that to do so sometimes requires writing a manifesto.

I now turn to another introduction that self-consciously reveals how a lifetime of painstaking research and schooling in the particulars of Cuban music are always, when put to page, generative rather than definitive. Natalio Galán was a Cuban writer and composer whose career spanned the rough bookends of the twentieth century. He was born in Camaguey in 1917 and died in New Orleans in 1985. His lived itinerary—including substantial stopovers in New York, Paris, and Puerto Rico—is familiar to many of the performers and critics in *Listening in Detail*. Galán’s great book, *Cuba y sus*

sones, remains tragically untranslated and almost unilaterally overlooked by critics on the island and off. This kind of erasure would be familiar to Galán, as he was also the primary (and like most assistants, ghosted) researcher for Alejo Carpentier's widely circulated *La música en Cuba*, originally published in 1946 (its English translation was published in 2001). If Carpentier's text, as Timothy Brennan rightly argues is, "among the most plagiarized masterpieces of the New World canon," Galán's research in the fields (musical and agricultural) suffers from a double erasure.²⁷

Cuba y sus sonos spans the fifteenth through twentieth centuries and is less a survey of Cuban music and more a lively impression of the historical and contradictory forces that mold music over time. Like the mazes that gird his native city built to confuse invaders in the seventeenth century, Galán leads readers through a bewildering set of narratives, locations, gossip, and musical transcriptions both technical and imaginative, to impress a beautiful and meticulously researched composite of the island and the populations that comprise it.

This text, in vibe and verve, bustles with the play and seriousness felt on a dance floor. It is no wonder, for Galán was also reportedly an incredible dancer. His moves were once described by Guillermo Cabrera Infante as somewhere between the comic rumba dancer Alberto Garrido and the more serious Julio Richards. As he points out, "Esta habilidad natural (mezcla de sentido de ritmo, coordinación de movimientos y gusto por la música) ha guiado también su libro."²⁸ [His natural ability (the mix of his sense of rhythm, coordination of movements, and musical taste) has also guided his book.] The text shamelessly corrupts the binaries that often govern discussions of popular culture: the high and low, classical and popular, the serious and nonserious.

Galán was familiar with it all and his interpretational skills as a composer and dancer are brought to the page with rousing energy. The book is an inspiring and hilarious and melancholic *experience with* rather than a detached ethnographic *account of* Cuban music.

Take the first line of *Cuba y sus sonos*:

En este libro se analizan leyendas históricomusicales que confundían los perfiles del sentido común. La música popular en la isla de Cuba

no escapa a esos delirios mágicos. Va a encontrar pasajes de erudición inevitable, pues es necesario entrar en lo técnico de la música para saber de qué materiales está hecho el sueño, pero habrá otros compensando el análisis erudito.²⁹

[This book analyzes historiomusical legends that confuse common sense. The popular music of Cuba does not escape this delirious magic. The reader will encounter inevitable erudite passages, for it is necessary to enter into the technicalities of music to understand what materials dreams are made of, but there are other things that compensate for the erudite analysis.]

From the outset of his book, and in the most simple and straightforward of terms, Galán has the nonsensical, magical, and illegible accompany the scholarly register. This is a writer who not only knew, and knew intimately, the histories of genres and their transgression, but also how combinations of notes and rhythms work together. Throughout his text, Galán offers technical notations. Some are more straightforward such as the charting of examples on musical clefs. Although I do not include technical transcriptions—a convention of many books about music—there are many moments where the scholarly and the magical sit side-by-side. As Galán reveals, popular Cuban music does not only allow but insists upon it. For Galán, even his technical transcriptions are given wide berth for graphic play as when he draws a sun shape shooting rays of light to illustrate genres and their provenance.

Listening in Detail takes interpretive license when trying to give readers a sense of what things sound like. I use description, musician's accounts, theoretical passages, and felt impressions to read performances closer rather than offer technical or graphic representations of notes and beats. As much as such analysis might or might not help to clarify what the music is technically doing, it reiterates there are things that remain vitally elusive to the critic and criticism. Galán's erudition and the space he gives to the difficult tangibles of history offers a well-established precedent when operating under the sign of Cuban music. Like Villa and Grenet, Galán is a protoperformance studies theorist whose work I do not plunder for data about history and genre. I look to Galán's work as another in a long line of attempts

to write about Cuban music specifically, and performance more generally. I position Galán's work as an alternative preamble to the writings about both, a positioning that takes into account the following stunner from his introduction:

Cuando el lector haya terminado este libro se preguntará: <<Bueno, ¿y qué?>>, sin poder alcanzar fronteras definiendo la aspiración del qué es la música cubana.³⁰

When the reader will have finished this book, they will ask: Ok, so what? They will be unable to catch up with the frontiers that define the aspiration of what Cuban music is.

In addition to underscoring the impossibility of defining Cuban music, and after a half century of research and experience and after 350-plus erudite and magical pages, Galán generously allows his labors and love be subjected to the disciplining question: Bueno, ¿y qué? With self-effacing humor, Galán does not want or care for his work to be available as a useful commodity, or as a single-use point of proof. He insists that it is one version, one writer's selection of stories and songs, that will forever be altered and alterable by the sounds it documents. Such is the humility—the certainty that one's work will be forever open to revision and debate—required by Cuban music.

Villa offers an ethos for performance, Suárez Cobián makes music an interaction with a fragmented past, Grenet reveals the forces that resist the genre-based project, and Galán suggests a mix of magic and erudition when writing about music. How can one proceed? There are, as these critics have already made clear, many options available for experimentation.

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

In this book, this version, this selection of stories and songs, I put considerable energy on the detail as a way to play with and disturb dominant narratives about Cuban music. Details puncture the notion that Cuban music can be known. The desire to know a culture, particularly a culture that might emerge from a former colony, wants satisfaction through a singular text, art exhibit, tour package, and compilation album. It hopes for and needs

experts to transmit a smooth and easily consumable surface. It believes in genres and treats their corruption with intransigence.³¹ The mixing of genres, however, is often met with a similar enthusiasm and dread usually shared around miscegenation. As I've already mentioned, there is no shortage of objects in circulation that seek to deliver the foregoing.³² But part of the enormous pleasure and pain of a lifetime of listening to Cuban music is its powerful ability to leave you naïve at every turn, to remind you that you know nothing.³³

I understand details as those fugitive and essential living components that contribute, in very specific ways, to an event and its aftermath. Details might be interruptions that catch your ear, musical tics that stubbornly refuse to go away. They are things you might first dismiss as idiosyncrasies. They are specific choices made by musicians and performers and come in an infinite number of forms: saludos, refusals, lyrics, arrangements, sounds, grunts, gestures, bends in voice. There is no way to know the intention, to get under or to demystify those choices, but they can be engaged as creative work. For performers, details are oftentimes a formal necessity, what Vijay Iyer calls "minute laborious acts that make up musical activity."³⁴ They might keep a song in time, offer instruction to musicians and dancers, mark tradition, and turn a researcher in another direction.

Listening in detail is not merely a receptive exercise, but also a transformative one that enables performative relationships to music and writing. For example, "Mambo King" Dámaso Pérez Prado, the subject of chapter 3, described his vocal grunt as a musical cue. Throughout the chapter, the grunts are also taken up as methodological cues. As his grunts reveal, details have the ability to jolt the most steadfast arguments. They demand for more revision in that same confident instant you've finally made some sense of them. I am still listening and rethinking the clang clang of bells and the corneta china that boldly take over the final two minutes of the Cuban pianist Alfredo Rodríguez's epic "Para Francia flores y para Cuba también."³⁵ This detail, you will discover, also takes over the final pages of chapter 1. Rodríguez is one of the musicians I discuss that reminds that details are about patience too: you have to go through a few things to deserve that *comparsa finale*.

Without reproducing the satisfaction that motivates some projects of recovery—the false belief the work is done when something or someone

is made visible or audible—I also mean details as those bits of history that get skipped over or left unattended. Details, are for many of us, wonderfully disruptive fissures that crack many a foundational premise behind all sorts of narratives. Feminist genealogical practices thrive in these fissures. Details, in the form of under-theorized musicians, are not deployed in this book to flesh out spotty timelines that require their erasure, but to reveal how their noise anticipates and disturbs those timelines. Not unrelated, these performers also gesture toward the fact of collaborative artistic contact between different populations. Throughout the chapters, you will find many glimmers of these collaborations. For now, imagine Ella Fitzgerald work with Machito in their unhesitant version of “One o’Clock Leap” recorded one night on Symphony Sid’s radio show.³⁶

There are different relationships to time that details demand. They have a unique ability to hold you up, like when you find out that the Maria Teresa Vera—one of the foundational figures in popular Cuban music—used to make nightly visits to the childhood home of Graciela Pérez. Graciela, the musician who drives chapter 2, would listen to Vera sing as she pretended to sleep in an adjacent room.³⁷ I hope that I have immediately given you pause. You have to just lay in moments like these. The time that details require should not be confused with a kind of micromanagement. They instead require a willing surrender to long-term schooling. One has to allow details to have a life of their own, to let them do their work. You have to put the headphones aside, step away from the computer, get down, let them bury themselves in your imagination. Delays, made possible by details, urge you to go back, listen a little harder, and continue to train yourself in whatever way possible—so that you can come back to the page with more care.

To proceed with an inclination for details bears its own kind of documentary practices. You can only play a set of songs or details in your way because, once again, you simply cannot know and do everything. You can only make an offering, a small, heartfelt contribution that might be taken up and altered some other time. Many of the musicians and critics that have made *Listening in Detail* possible have skewed circuits of reproduction and heteronormative notions of legacy by way of what they’ve left behind. To sing is not necessarily to ossify oneself in the record, but to lay down your voice in the hopes of being revisited and revised at some point. To publish

is not necessarily to have the last word on a matter, but to leave oneself open to debate and contention. To hope that, at the very least, you might offer some kind of instruction that can be taken up, ignored, or a little bit of both.

One of the principal interventions I'm extending in *Listening in Detail* is that Cuban music, as sound and performance, makes a singular through line or univocal scholarly mode impossible. To argue for/in/under Cuban music in singular terms prohibits the pulsing and uncontained effects on all that makes contact with it. Its details offer powerful and necessarily disorienting portals into histories that resist cohesive narrative structures. I challenge the usage of details as things to be excavated and made epistemologically useful to instead allow for their retreat back into whatever productive bunker they've been hiding. They effect in flashes and refuse analytical capture. The fugitivity of details allows us to honor their effects in the here-and-now and to imagine how they will perform in some future assembly.

My understanding of details as events that instantly reveal and honor what can't be said—as well as agents that also withhold what can—corresponds to what Fred Moten has argued as the necessity of secrets, of

the need for the fugitive, the immigrant and the new (and newly constrained) citizen to hold something in reserve, to keep a secret. The history of Afro-diasporic art, especially music, is, it seems to me, the history of keeping this secret even in the midst of its intensely public and highly commodified dissemination. These secrets are relayed and miscommunicated, misheard and overheard, often all at once, in words and in the bending of words, in whispers and screams, in broken sentences, in the names of people you'll never know.³⁸

I hear the reveal and misreveal of sonic details made by musicians and their instruments, by courageous scholars' critical disruptions, by artists' material experimentations, and by those everyday nondisclosures of friends and family as a persistent struggle against the demand of being a singular, transparent, commodifiable, or in any way fixed object for display and consumption. This withholding is of historical necessity and has guaranteed the survival of ancient and newly created knowledges in Cuban music.

Details, like these secrets, are the creative obstacles that can turn a critic away from any futile attempt to make them cohere and toward another

kind of work. Instead of ossifying them into evidence for a totalizing argument, details can affect listening, writing, and reading practices in ways not immediately apparent or thought possible. In chapter 4, for example, I examine cinematic details from two musical documentaries made by Rogelio París and Sara Gómez in the decade after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Although it has been more than four decades since they were produced, and about a decade since I first saw them, they still influence how I interact with the Cuba of the past and present. The details of these films are dynamic living agents that offer a chance to catch one's breath and then to lose it all over again. Their internal crosscurrents prevent them from becoming stationary source material that I use to force an argument or static ideological position.

In addition to the performers and writers I've already mentioned, my theory of listening in detail—and specifically to the Cuban musical detail—is also under the influence of the great experimental Cuban American playwright María Irene Fornés. Consider first that Fornés has forever been assaulted for a supposed lack of Cubanness in her work. In her plays, you will be hard pressed to find much along the lines of predictably tropical and otherwise minoritarian signifiers, be they accents, easily comprehensible characters, or uncomplicated plot lines. Like many of the inscrutable performers and theorists I discuss throughout this book, Fornés forms part of a solid tradition of challenging readers' desired right of entry to her work and interior life.

Like Cuba and like performance, Fornés has long refused those burdens of representation that would have her explain in exacting terms what Cuba, performance, or Cubanness is. Her work does not provide access into facile questions around identity as they are bound up with culture, geography, gender, race, and belonging. But as much as she refuses to offer direct signals that might or might not indicate her Cubanness, she does not keep it under erasure. The question that Fornés has persistently challenged us with is, what can Cubanness sound like? How does Cubanness articulate itself by way of the secret both exposed and guarded? There is a moment in Fornés's oeuvre that helps to engage these questions, specifically around how the Cuban musical detail can expand and retract, and clarify and confuse what Cubanness can mean, especially in the relationship between listening and writing.

In her essay, “I Write These Messages That Come” Fornés made known part of her creative process behind the writing of what would become her celebrated, *Fefu and Her Friends*. Fornés writes that during the play’s composition, she listened to Olga Guillot, the Cuban Queen of Bolero, on perpetual replay. She later remarked of the process, “my neighbors must have thought I was out of my mind. There was one record, *Añorando el Caribe*, particularly seemed to make my juices run. I just left it on the turntable and let it go on and on. The play had nothing to do with Olga Guillot . . . But her voice kept me oiled.”³⁹ Fornés reveals how writing with, about, and alongside music is to permit its many details to enter the work. These details cannot be subjugated to discursive control, nor are their effects transparent in the final draft. Her voice kept her oiled, which is to say, made things run, contoured her writing, kept her imagination active. If you’d like to keep up with the metaphor, you might also say that La Guillot kept her fine-tuned, jacked-up, lubricated. And yet, I would not like to put Guillot at the service of having turned Fornés into a productive worker, for if there is *any* voice that can throw a wrench into capitalist productivity, it is Guillot’s. It is a voice that’s always too much, excessive, queer, deep, one that is unashamed to devote work and time to heartbreak, unrequited love, and revenge fantasies on behalf of those done wrong. Whether writing on perfumed stationary or a laptop, modeling the inquietude that is the form and content of Guillot’s work is familiar to many. Hers is an all-out voice that moves the pen or keyboard stroke in approximate mimicry with those fluid arm gestures for which she is so dearly known. The voice is a testimony and an instruction: one can learn how to creatively interpret hard feelings while fully taking a stage with confident grace.

Imagine the many details operative in the anecdote above. There is Olga Guillot, a performer who impressed incredible influence on generations of Cuban singers and audiences from the 1940s and onward. While Guillot has one of the more fervent fan bases typical of most diva publics, she is still not given the critical attention she deserves. She is a significant detail in the history of Cuban music who has yet to experience a sustained due. There is the detail of the album, *Añorando el Caribe*, which contains a trove of details to get lost in, from the heavy subtle vibrato that augments her interpretation of the standard “En el tronco de un árbol,” to the indignant diaphragmatic



FIG. INTRO.2: Olga Guillot, album cover of *Añorando el Caribe*, 1964.

pressure she uses to push the notes out on “Obsesión.” Who knows which details struck Fornés from this detailed selection of Guillot’s voluminous recorded archive. What we do know: Guillot affected Fornés in ways beyond her comprehension but she is nevertheless recognized as a profound imprint on her work. Fornés cites Guillot as a contributor to her imagination. The secrets, the whispers and screams, the names that we don’t and can’t know that Guillot left behind on this album are an intricate, if immeasurable part of one of the experimental masterpieces of the American theater.

I take this moment in Fornés to propose listening in detail as a method that is not invested in possession or clarification. This method lets the music go on and on, though you might not be aware or in control of how it moves

you. It maintains that the influence of details is often as inscrutable as the details themselves. Here Fornés shows how the revelation of details can conspire to make outside onlookers view your work with curiosity, suspicion, or generous attention. In the top spot of its definition list, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites *method* as, “a procedure for attaining an object.” The goal of method as such is to catch or overtake an object for some purpose. To the less empirically inclined in the academy, questions around method (always in the singular) are posed out of curiosity, and quite often, as a means to assault. Being unable to answer questions about method is to admit a kind of madness. Our neighbors often think that we’re out of our minds. Fornés, always a profile in courage, nevertheless resists making the impressions clear: the play had “nothing to do” with Guillot and yet she acknowledges that her sound generated material effects on the writing. The proof of this sound effect is not made clear on the surface of the work, but we can nevertheless be certain that Guillot is an active part of the writer’s soil, the generative material that gave it life.

To write alongside and at the same time about music requires much rehearsal.⁴⁰ It is a perpetual preparation, with the hope, long hours, and exhaustion that goes down in the process. This work is not always evident in the actual performance, but is far from undetectable. Alejo Carpentier, for one, once referred to his *La música en Cuba* as that which “trained [him] . . . to write the later novels.”⁴¹ This practice has motivated the writing of *Listening in Detail* and can be thought of as a guide for its reading. I rely on an assumption that there are many details heard on repeated play that have kept this thing oiled, even if they are not easily detectable in the text itself. As much as this practice has governed the writing of this book, it has also moved the reading and hearing of others. Rethinking the terms of Cuban music’s influence in ways that cannot be proven in an epistemologically friendly package is another of the book’s brazen aims. To imagine what folks were listening to, or how certain sounds took hold of them in their words and music, asks for flexibility with how we understand evidence. It has been difficult, if not impossible, to legibly fix some of the figures found in these pages to the scenes of Cuban music, both live and recorded. Their contact with it might have been fleeting, their involvement immeasurable. In a collection of papers at the Beinecke Library, I once stumbled on a slip of paper.

In his characteristic cursive, Langston Hughes wrote in pencil, “The syncopated tittering and stuttering of Cuban orchestras.”⁴² This kind of fleeting, though material detail, allows for tacit acknowledgment of the sonic residuals in Hughes’s writing of the meantime and in the beat thereafter.

“Her voice kept me oiled” is a tremendous gift of a detail for many reasons. Beyond what it offers for thoughtful writing, Fornés extends a poetic way to trick certain oppositions that (still) get held up particularly between writing and music. Her axiom shakes a few things up, especially the false binary maintained between theater and music.⁴³ Music—often disregarded as the dead recorded counterpoint to the live object of theater—goes undertheorized as an intricate part of the event. Or it is denied an active, living place because it is often not made available in the live. As Fornés makes clear, music happens, music appears, music makes certain things possible in ways that are much trickier, say, than the placement of songs in the narrative arc of a play or novel or essay or history. It effects in ways that beg to differ from what Patrice Pavis calls, “incidental music.”⁴⁴

By way of the Guillotian detail, Fornés keeps the straits muddy between recording and liveness, a false opposition that would have the former presume the absence of the latter. Fornés troubles ideas around presence and absence in relation to the writing alongside, if not about recorded music. Her essay asks us to imagine the resurface of *Añorando el Caribe* and of Guillot herself in every staging or reading of *Fefu and Her Friends*, and, it could be argued, of Fornés’s larger oeuvre. As she wrote, for example, consider how Guillot was present, even if her presence was by way of the recorded object. The repeated flipping of her record echoes the charged practices that have long modulated the hearing of Cuban musicians, even if the constraints have changed over time. Cuban musicians have long had to have their recorded selves occupy particular spaces or cross certain borders because their bodies are not allowed to. Such flipping reminds the listener that though they might be able to control these musicians’ frequency, performers still reach out from the speakers to alter their experience in unexpected ways.

To the theory of listening in detail, Fornés also offers a way to consider the effects of Cuban musicians and musicality to a more nuanced understanding of writing, of performance, and of the practices of American experimentalism.⁴⁵ Like the resistant tones in the guiding of Cuban music, the

secrets maintained by Afro-diasporic art, and music's refusal to participate in oppositions between liveness and recording, Fornés reiterates how the strategic power of details resist intelligible understandings of Cubanness and aesthetics.

To listen in detail is to enliven Cuban music's relationship to aesthetics, rather than solely to the ethnographic, which has been its primary relational and consumptive mode. Such a prevalent relationship to the ethnographic is likely to do with Cuba's colonial status of past and present, its difficult racial landscape, and the uncontained excesses of its geographical boundaries. The ethnographic use of the detail, which might be summed up as the discovery of undiscovered material for the purpose of taxonomy, sets up the detail as an observable part of a natural order. The assumption that musical practices—even (and especially) if they require extensive detective work—are always observable or audible phenomena that can be tracked, leaves out a universe of necessarily submerged details that tirelessly work to upend structures of power. To listen to the details of Cuban music as an aesthetic category, in other words, does not ignore their immediate relationship to struggle and experimentation with freedom.

Listening in detail is a mode of engaging things that are bigger than ourselves. It offers alternative approaches to the too-muchness of events. Of course, working with details and the detailed mode has haunted centuries of scholarship. Details have long been used as access points into texts and deployed, often heavy-handedly, as proof of the false order of modernity.⁴⁶ This modal usage, often marked as an extension from Hegel, right through the male trajectory of structural and poststructural thinking and into New Historicism's investment in the anecdote, has reviled and revered, rejected and depended upon the detail to show, in one way or another, that things are not what they appear to be. The rehearsal of such an itinerary could, quite rightly, occupy volumes (and has).⁴⁷ In place of such an encyclopedic account, I turn instead to Naomi Schor's entry, *Reading in Detail*, partly to acknowledge the detail's trajectory and to keep our urgent attention on how the detail's contemporary cache often refuses and denies its historical instrumentalization as gendered and sexual difference. In her words, "The detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine."⁴⁸

While many thinkers have taken up the detail, minute, partial, and fragmentary to interrupt the ideal in aesthetic and historical discourses, Schor's work is a powerful reminder of the alignment made between the detail and the feminine, effeminate and ornamental. Because of the extensive history of such alignment in philosophical thought, scholars cannot erase how the detail—whether in the form of gendered object, scholar, or artist—was long devalued as an insignificant, excessive, and inconvenient particularity for an idealized whole. Although she warns of getting lost in detail, Schor's work makes possible a way of thinking with detail beyond the economies of representation, for example, as the “particular” litmus of the “general.”⁴⁹ She recognizes the detail as idiosyncrasy in its many guises—whether coded as ornamental, effeminate, and decadent—to alter the terms of reading, and as I would add, of listening.

Through Schor's linking of the detail as an aesthetic category to the feminine, *Reading in Detail* has done crucially important work for critical theory. I argue that her prescient and provocative work also offers useful points of critique at the intersection of music, race, and postcolonial studies. In the study and writing about music, the detail's alignment with the feminine has often enabled its fetishistic deployment. From traditional musicology to popular music studies, the musical detail is often made an object of exploration, a burden of exception, a display of prowess and proof of savvy connoisseurship. Traditional musicology's canonical refusal to consider the gendering of the detail—or gender *as* detail—is especially pronounced when put to the service of penetration, as a “way into” the music's secret.⁵⁰ There is a masculinist tendency in popular music criticism that authorizes the transformation of obscure musical details into source material that needs little to no sustained analysis. This tendency often turns into a game of one-upmanship that puts players in a race to put their tag of ownership on rare details as they come across them. These details are made into idiosyncratic anomalies for collection rather than thoughtful reflection. Schor's work helps me to remind musical scholarship of the historical uses of the detail while also giving me a few tools to reconfigure it.

I pay a brief but thoughtful homage to Schor's way of being and writing with objects to honor the reparative attention that details demand and deserve, and to reside in musical criticism as an analytical register that is con-

versant with a field such as literary studies, rather than derivative from it. I do not translate Schor's work into a musical register, for example, by making music adapt to the protocols of literary studies and their established reading practices. Some writings about music and performance are often made and read as executions of literary style. Such work makes music and performance the objects of writing rather than objects that produce writing. Together with Fornés, I turn to Schor's mode of reading as a mode of writing while listening; a mode of writing while listening that does not only attend to the detail as feminine, but as also and always raced and migratory. I take Schor quite seriously when she writes, "to retell the story from the perspective of the detail is inevitably to tell *another* story."⁵¹ The details in these pages offer their own unique versions of how time has passed us by.

What might it mean to think of listening in detail as something that can't be helped? For some, getting lost in details is inconvenient, time consuming, and a general aberration. For others, getting lost in details is not a choice. To borrow Schor's words, my work with detail is partly "an effort to legitimate my own instinctive critical practice."⁵² Details attend to us even as we attend to them. The comfort that details provide is, to some degree, due to their ability to embody familial and familiar substances, whether constructed from memory or made anew. There is often an instant recognition that calls your attention to a musical detail: you *can't help* but recognize a loved one, a time and place, or the sound of an experience. For similar reasons, details also carry what can feel like unbearable reminders of past violences. They keep alive history's painful parts.

To detail is also a verb, as in to lend "attention to particulars."⁵³ Some of those particulars need to be laid to rest, others need to be resurrected. Some need to be resurrected so that they can be laid to rest. The Hmong writer Mai Der Vang once found a tattered jacket in an unopened suitcase in her mom's closet. She discovered it was what her mom wore when having to flee her village in Laos. Vang later revealed, "You might find these relics in a suitcase and that's how these stories happen . . . Parents don't sit down and say 'Let me tell you.'"⁵⁴ Details can be portals offered and withheld by many a sage elder during the study of difficult histories. They are things that make you proceed poco a poco. In chapter 5, I proceed carefully into detailed portals left behind by immediate and adoptive family members. Although the

details I examine live in Cuban America, I find their transformative potential when listening to them alongside details left behind by other immigrant populations divided by the cold wars. These details, I discover, offer compelling companionship for one another.

HISTORICAL OVERTURES

Although music—especially music that derives from ancient traditions from multiple continents—always resists periodization, the historical setting of this book focuses mainly on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It concentrates on performances enacted during the decades of Cuban history and its involvement with the United States after gaining independence from Spain in 1898, concludes with the present, and extends into a hopeful future. Alongside these flexible temporal coordinates, *Listening in Detail* depends upon a material and imaginary extension of Cuban geography in the spirit of what Ana M. López boldly termed “Greater Cuba.” López extends the phrase “Greater Cuba” to incorporate the island’s long tradition of exile—and the locations impacted by it—as not external to, but intricate part of Cuban nationhood. Although López initially offered the term to discuss exiled filmmakers following the 1959 revolution, she also incorporates those waves of migration during times of political upheaval, from the aftermath of Cuba’s independence from Spain to the contemporary moment, into the larger Cuban imaginary. As López writes, “This significant part of the ‘nation’ is deeply woven into the history of ‘Cuba’ that exceeds national boundaries. At the margins of the nation as such, this community functions both as mirror (sharing traditions, codes, symbols and discursive strategies) and as supplement.”⁵⁵ This book acknowledges and lives in the varied international locations of Greater Cuba such as Paris and Mexico City, but concentrates principally on the actual and affective geographies in the United States.

To illustrate some of the ways I am interested in the entanglement between Cuba and the United States, I offer a song and sonic detail as an entry into this book’s historical context. “Un besito por teléfono” (A kiss by telephone) is a convivial cha-cha-cha with just the right elasticity for a horn sec-

tion, much percussion and even some romantic cordiality.⁵⁶ Recorded by the exalted Orquesta Riverside in 1953, it is a sound for when love feels good and light; when giving (and getting) a kiss by telephone is enough to make you cross the length of the dance floor without missing a beat. Halfway through the song Pedro Justiz, the great pianist also known as “Peruchín,” moves in from the percussive background to play the chorus from the standard “Jeepers Creepers.” Peruchín plays it straight and then gently versions it for a few good measures before moving back into the larger orchestra. The citation sounds like a suspended figure floating above the number. “Jeepers Creepers” was a collaborative song writing effort between Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer for the 1938 film *Going Places*. Although the song has been recorded many times over, the standard was made wildly popular by Louis Armstrong’s original performance of it.⁵⁷

Peruchín’s sampling of the standard and/as Louis Armstrong—the ease with which he moves them in and out of the main texture of the song—is the kind of musical action that alters the usual trappings of the question: what do the United States and Cuba have to do with each other? The query has preoccupied many over the centuries in part due to its geographical obviousness. Permit me to repeat the melancholic repertory. On a map, even a svelte thumb can cover up the blue distance between Cuba and the United States. Currents—if they’re not against you—can float you across the Florida Straits in the matter of days. By plane, transit time can be shorter than a subway ride between the Bronx and Brooklyn.⁵⁸ There have been centuries of less-than-diplomatic snarling as a result of such proximity. One can imagine how the policy implications of one impacted the other by simply taking into account this geographical intimacy.

Cuba was an early experimental site for US imperialistic pursuits off the mainland, particularly after it seized its independence from Spain in 1898. The island’s struggles for independence and self-determination have been greatly impacted by its anomalous status: at once an “ever faithful isle” and a cauldron of colonial disobedience. Given that this perplexing ruckus has taken place a mere ninety miles from the US mainland, it is no wonder that Cuba has long captivated and disturbed its neighbors to the north. As Louis Pérez Jr. keenly argues,

Cuba seized hold of the North American imagination early in the nineteenth century. What made awareness of Cuba particularly significant were the ways that it acted on the formation of the American consciousness of nationhood. The destiny of the nation seemed inextricably bound to the fate of the island. It was impossible to imagine the former without attention to the latter.⁵⁹

A comprehensive history of Cuba's grip on the American imagination (and vice versa) requires epic structure and effort. Thankfully, these energies have already been taken up elsewhere.⁶⁰ Take, as some examples, the gulf-wide plantation machine—made possible by what Kamau Brathwaite called the “slave trade winds”—and its accompanying industries, material and musical. Global port traffic between New Orleans and Havana linked up the two nations before either could claim independence. In the antebellum era, elite Cuban planters had long harbored annexationist fantasies of hitching their enterprises up with the US south.⁶¹ There were also insurrectionist fantasies shared between the fields. As long as the island remained a Spanish possession, the United States performed relative neutrality toward Cuba. While Cuban independence fighters waged almost more than a decade of armed struggle against colonial Spanish (two organized struggles from 1868–1878 and 1879–1880), the United States could be described as a lying-in-wait.⁶² It was the final Cuban Independence War (1895–1898) that galvanized US militaristic intervention. It was also, incidentally, a mission that would unite a fractured United States after the civil war.⁶³

Captivated by casualties of war, atrocities inflicted by the Spanish, and the overall depletion of resources, the United States watched as Cuba limped along in battle. After months of public and legislative debate, President McKinley would execute what would become a model for US imperial benevolence. He sent the USS *Maine* to protect American lives or interests that might be in danger. A month after the ship arrived in January of 1898, the USS *Maine* exploded and almost three hundred servicemen perished. To this day, there is a debate as to the perpetrators of the incident. Regardless, it gave the United States a reason to hijack the conflict that was the Cuban Independence War, what would thenceforth be called the “Spanish American War.”⁶⁴ Pérez underscores the magnitude of the event,

manifest destiny as a matter of logic for an international presence was confirmed in 1898, in which Americans understood as a victory achieved—unaided—with such complete success. The empire that followed was providential, proof that Americans had been called upon to discharge their duty to mankind.⁶⁵

The expulsion of Spain from the island also made way for a series of occupations thanks to the disturbing flexibility of the Platt Amendment. The amendment was used to generate codependant economic treaties, the facilitation of coups, formal and informal blockading, and of course, the tough spot of Guantanamo.⁶⁶

The Platt Amendment was part of what propelled a post-independence Cuba from one colonizer to the other. Cuban energies were so adamantly focused on casting Spain adrift that resources that might be used to monitor the US accumulation of national industries, land, and capital fell under the radar of all those but the Cuban social and political elite. Cuba's consequential development into a monocultural society dependent on sugar was greatly determined by reciprocity treaties favorably tilted toward US interests.⁶⁷ Political parties and candidates who furthered the agenda of an encroaching US takeover maintained a stronghold on the island. Severe political repression, poverty, and land mismanagement were some of the effects of these neocolonial policies.

As US companies (including the Hershey Corporation and the United Fruit Company) amassed ownership over the republic's sugar industry, accompanying ideologies were also imported and instituted down south.⁶⁸ The racial ideologies of the United States combined with Cuba's own to tragically disregard the expectations and political rights of many Cubans of color in the new republic. Many of these attitudes took their cue from Jim Crow America and were institutionally implemented during Cuba's reconstruction. As Aline Helg illustrates, one of the most psychologically damaging examples was the disbanding of the Liberation Army, a multiracial group of soldiers (called mambises) that had secured Cuban independence. The army, headed predominantly by Cubans of color (*gente de color*), had been an unprecedented body of cross-racial affiliation and solidarity during the war. Subsequent national militias were then segregated by race. In the politi-

cal realm, literacy requirements decreed in the new voting laws barred the participation of many mambises and other Afro-Cubans.

For many Cubans of color, the idea of upward mobility in the new republic became what Nuyorican poet Willie Perdomo usefully termed elsewhere “a sold-out dream.”⁶⁹ The US-owned companies who entered to benevolently save Cuba’s tattered state installed better educated, middle-to-upper class white Cubans—many of whom already had established contacts with the United States—in primary wage-earning positions.⁷⁰ Cubans’ of color increasing frustration and activism was met with brute force and the repression of participatory outlets, including the outlawing of political parties based on race, performances of “illicit” musics such as the highly percussive guaguancó, and lucumí religious practices.⁷¹ Post-independence also saw the importation of more than three hundred thousand Spanish laborers to “whiten” the island from its increasingly darker (and possibly insurgent) demographics, reaching its height in the 1930s. This push to import betrays a resonant fear not yet overcome from the Haitian Revolution of 1789.

What do the United States and Cuba have to do with each other? This question has long been entertained by academic disciplines and its attendant scholarship. The intertwining mentioned in the foregoing does much to reveal, but also to conceal other kinds of involvements. Contrary to the seemingly sudden appearance of transnational rubrics in scholarship, this route of inquiry is a well-trod path. There are so many who, in one way or another, have left behind a deep paper trail. We might start with what the land made possible before they became nations, say by itinerant Ciboney populations or the scribed sixteenth-century wanderings of Cabeza de Vaca. Countless love letters were sent by ship across the short sea. Beyond these unpublished findings, the role of one nation in the imaginary of the other has been substantive in published works in a multitude of genres. As early as 1859, Martin Delany used Cuba as the site and substance of insurgency in his serial *Blake: Or the Huts of America*. There’s Cuba in the American gothic: read about an interracial mulata romance gone wrong by way of Mary Peabody Mann’s 1887 *Juanita: A Romance of Real Life in Cuba Fifty Years Ago*. Cirilio Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés or El Angel Hill*, one of the most important Cuban novels of the nineteenth century, was written and published from New York City due to the author’s exile for anticolonial activities. There was

transnational circulation of *Minerva: Revista quincenal dedicada a la mujer de color* (*Minerva: The Biweekly Magazine for the Woman of Color*) in the 1880s.⁷² Before the nineteenth century would take its final bow, José Martí launched manifestos for Cuban independence from Spain *and* significant treatises on Emerson and Coney Island from an apartment on the west side of New York City.

Part of the great challenge of this project is to reflect upon these involvements without resorting either to the corrective impulse or to a call for inclusion. To make a corrective suggests a finite process—the seeking out of a curative that could somehow make the racial and geographical logics of empire fully comprehensible. Some of the details in which I tread signal the mingling of populations—specifically, between Cubans and African Americans—that have always been in collaboration, musically and otherwise, in the underground of empire. To make legible these muddy, often undocumented, and hidden connections in a way that might read easily as evidence of “transnational contact” would place them at the service of a finite corrective. Consider the time when Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Cuba’s vanguard rumba collective, performed the song to the orisha Obatalá and seamlessly transitioned to a tap-dance number in New York City in 2011. The song combined a call to invocation with the melodic resistance of a chain gang. Such inventive combination, in addition to the gold sequined fedoras and vests they wore, did much to disturb desires for the folkloric that have long been harbored by US audiences. The ritual-to-tap transition does much to thwart the narratives of Cuba being sealed off and separated from the other side of the gulf. And because of the half-century long embargo enacted to separate populations from one another, this sustained conversation between these cultural forms do not lend itself to clear, evidentiary models.

Listening in Detail is a contribution to the groundwork of scholarship on the Afro-diaspora that understands blackness as an expansive experience that traverses the boundaries of the United States. It is particularly attuned to the work of Hortense Spillers and Fred Moten that evokes blackness as not only as a thing, but also a doing; blackness conjures people and a flexible set of mobile practices. For this reason, this book disturbs the situational binary that can overdetermine work in black studies. Its locational details, and the theories I use to examine them, troubles that false divide that separates

domestic US-based experiences from the diaspora. The US.-based experience is often employed as the control part of the experiment in comparative work with other national racial paradigms. Although “diaspora” is an expansive, important, and ambiguous descriptive, it tends to create centers and margins, especially, though not exclusively, around language. Anglophone and Francophone nations have been made central to the diaspora of black studies as Hispanophone nations remain in the margins. Nations such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, however, can’t be relegated to a distinct or comparative “diasporic” experience because they were, and in the case of Puerto Rico, still are part of US empire. This book lives in theories of blackness that allow for experiences and cultural practices of African Americanness as they necessarily intersect with those of the Afro-diaspora. It does not force Cuba into a canon of African American studies, or reify it as part of the Afro-Latino/a project, which can limit blackness to skin color and issues of representation. Details in Cuban music, as I suggest throughout this book, break down the domestic/diaspora tendency in black studies at the level of sound, personhood, geography, and scholarship. They, together with the scholars I’ve mentioned in the above, unhinge blackness from notions of property or possession.

Interrelational precedents between the nations and populations and scholars are impossible to reduce here. There are too many details to set down in this and any text. I offer these incomplete fragments in the spirit of Junot Díaz’s footnotes on contemporary history of the Dominican Republic that guide his *The Brief and Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao*. Works that involve things Caribbean are usually required to offer these kinds of orienting backbeats to set up their stakes for outsiders. I also include these precursory fragments to insist on how the book’s performers and critics, across the media, cannot be cut off from the prehistory of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The US embargo against Cuba, waged in 1961, has done much to produce what Ned Sublette has called a “communications blackout” between the United States and Cuba. This blackout has fostered a tendency in scholarship and the everyday to use the year 1959 to violently partition contemporary Cuban history in half. This partition is not only ideological, but also material. For nations that are still embroiled in the cold wars, walls and the other literalizations of dividing lines are built into the nation and national psyche. Such

demarcations have done much to impact but not prevent the mobility of its people and their music across the divides. *Listening in Detail* works with these cracks of light from the start of chapter 1 until the performers featured in the fifth and final chapter blow it wide open.

The example of “Un besito del teléfono,” that I described in the above foreshadows, to borrow Lisa Brock’s useful phrase, the “unrecognized linkages” that grab a hold of this book.⁷³ I’ve also offered other conditions of entanglement as facilitated through policy, economy, literature, transnational migration, and multiple forms of correspondence. As much as the question is asked—what do Cuba and the United States have to do with each other?—it has also gone persistently unasked, especially when it intersects with that other spectral question: what do race and empire have to do with each other? It is at this interstice that much work has been done to both confront and avoid the question. And it is at this interstice that much of *Listening in Detail* is situated. Throughout its pages, I’ll offer my own meditations on how music offers other ways of approaching these twinned questions that might augment the important work of literary historians, musicologists, and the larger sociological project. This is not an invective against these knowledge productions, but rather, an acknowledgment that said productions can leave behind productive silences that, paradoxically, do much to amplify muted objects of study. Nor is this acknowledgment about any desire on my part to capture what they ostensibly missed. I’d simply like to transmit what critical alternatives music offers.

Such transmissions might not sound or feel like the usual scholarly work on race, nation, empire, and gender. Music has forever offered other ways of writing under these rubrics.⁷⁴ Music has been used as structure, storyteller, subterfuge, camouflage, backbeat, and way of being. Consider how W. E. B. Du Bois would use music to arrange his work on and about the color line or how Lydia Cabrera’s stunning work on lucumi songs and rituals do more to reveal what official history does not. Consider how Yolanda Broyles-González’s arrangement of Lydia Mendoza’s autobiography navigates the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and nation. Although I teach (and never tire of teaching) *With his pistol in his hand*, I am always struck by how Américo Paredes made his study on the musics of the US-Mexico border not only a documentation of oral traditions, but also an inscription of those bloody

violences enacted on the border on the greater American memory. Listen to how Paredes peppers his text with a demonstration of the scholarly chops likely necessary to do the work he really wanted to do, say via his citations of his research on Scottish balladry. Talk of his “conditions of labor” can’t begin to adequately acknowledge the deft moves he made and left behind for the rest of us to pick up and make our own.⁷⁵ That he did so, while making his way through the midcentury academy, shows the kind of camouflage and commitment required by those of us who might work on areas, archives, and populations unfamiliar to certain academic disciplines and institutions.

DIRECTIVES FOR WRITING AND READING

Listening in Detail hopes to offer an *experience with* rather than *account of* Cuban music. Each chapter is a performative explication of the practice of listening in detail rather than belabored exemplar of it. Because I am not interested in wielding “listening in detail” as a fixed theoretical formula, the reader should know in advance that I rearticulate it in my writerly practices. I reiterate that “listening in detail” is a practice, not a heavy anchor that I use to ground this book. For example, in this introduction—my saludo—I began with a detail and detailed listening of a performance and performer. Bola de Nieve opened up an alternative milieu for the writings on Cuban music, moved me into histories blatant and submerged, required a meditation on the relationship between writing and listening, offered a sense of what it feels like to do this kind of work in the contemporary US academy—all while helping to set up an environment for theories on the detail as a mode of engagement with the sonic. This directional flow of ideas, a flow that moves from performer and performance to analysis, shapes each chapter.

Details are, after all, supple directives. It is through the illegible but palpable, familiar and foreign, nowhere but locatable substances of and in performer’s directives that have long guided and carried away my prose. Recall those early directives that made listening directly impact you everyday. For example, those commands that enhanced nascent and current delinquencies: a voice that shaped your adolescent rage, a guitar that made you skip class. Recall a vocal grain that made you want to get older. A chord that inspired kindness. A beat that made you shut up and dance.

I conclude with a directive offered by a song that inspired the book's writing and will hopefully offer one for its reading: the Orquesta Ritmo Oriental's 1975 "Yo bailo de todo," which translates roughly to "I dance to all of it." I surface this song for serious reasons. Filling the page with their sound is the best, most get-down way I can introduce a practice I humbly hope to approximate in not just my work and teaching life, but I should also say, my everyday. I engage this song in the work less by talking about what it musically is, and more about what it does. While being able to say more about the formal structure of "Yo bailo de todo" and its relationship to genre is interesting work, it is not what I do. Besides, Kevin Moore has already entered into the formal thickets of the song in superb and jaw-dropping detail.⁷⁶ Following in the school of Christopher Small, I'm after what it does.⁷⁷

The song is one of the most driving and difficult charanga-style songs put to practice.⁷⁸ It pulls together instruments introduced through migration and conquest into a baroque whirlwind of percussion, strings, assertive vocals, and an irreverent flute. They are arranged in ways that affirm that everything is in fact possible. Its tangled tempos are such that only the deftest of dancers could anticipate and follow they ways they switch up in the song. The charanga style is relentless dance music. It is a repetitive grind, an unforgiving and unforgetting whirl of sound that refuses to stop. The charanga's universe of different drums, violins, and the flute carry ghosts of pasts and present. The song—and the greater tidal charanga effect—alters every and any scholarly landscape discussed throughout this book. Such is a convention and contribution of the islands' creative and critical practices. As Glissant wrote,

The Caribbean, the Other America. Banging away incessantly at the main ideas will perhaps lead to exposing the space they occupy in us. Repetition of these ideas does not clarify their expression; on the contrary, it perhaps leads to obscurity. We need those stubborn shadows where repetition leads to perpetual concealment, which is our form of resistance.⁷⁹

The musicians of the Orquesta Ritmo Oriental, with their dexterity and craft with repetition and their unhalting rhythmic drive, summon the stubborn shadows of history but also give them room to retreat.

The details of and in this song come together to offer a vital directive for the writing and reading of this book: an openness for interdisciplinary work and an instruction to have a good time while doing it. The song offers a mantra the book borrows to proudly proclaim scholarly flexibility to work between the fields. The rock and roll fantasy: to answer the question, “What is your field?” or “What fields does your book occupy?” with: “I dance to all of it.” I invite the reader to do the same. The song’s musical complexity, with its difficult rhythms, the incredible ways all the instruments—and the histories they shorthand—are compressed in this brief life of recording, reveals a willingness to take in past, present, and future at once. The virtuosity in this song—and the histories that made such virtuosity possible—would of course require several lifetimes to approximate. That is not to say, however, that we can’t try.

It is musicians’ detailed directives that organize the chapters of this book. Chapter 1, “Performing Anthology: The Mystical Qualities of Alfredo Rodríguez’s *Cuba Linda*,” takes the extraordinary album *Cuba Linda* (1996) by the Cuban pianist Alfredo Rodríguez to construct an alternative acoustic map of Cuban music. I hear the album’s details as portals into the late nineteenth-century New Orleans to contemporary Paris, and work with them to defamiliarize the historical and discursive protocols used to explain Cuban music. The album’s genealogical threads can be traced into jazz and early twentieth century touring theatrical reviews. Together with these performative precursors, I also contextualize *Cuba Linda* alongside the African American literary anthology as envisioned by James Weldon Johnson. By bridging studies of performance with the literary, I argue that *Cuba Linda* offers innovative sonic work that reveals the limits and potential that studies of genre, live revues, and literary anthologies often fail to do. The album is an object, like so many Cuban musical objects, whose compact vastness allows for many creative responses to the forces of history and the people who were impacted by them.

The second chapter, “Una Escuela Rara: The Graciela School,” analyzes the work of Graciela Pérez, best known as the vocalist for the New York based band Machito and His Afro-Cubans, a founding group for what comes to be known as “cubop” or Latin jazz in the mid-1940s. Pérez’s oeuvre, however, spans from the early 1930s to 2004, travels through several conti-

nents and genres. Although mindful listening to her recorded music moved the writing of the chapter, I also focus on a set of details from a series of oral histories Pérez recorded with the Smithsonian Museum in 1998, and others conducted by myself between 2005–2008. Through careful attention to her interviews, I argue Graciela left behind a set of instructions for close and attentive listening practices. Such instructions do not only reveal how musicians are constantly theorizing their own practices, but in Graciela's case, demand and encourage scholarly improvisation when writing about them.

Chapter 3, "Itinerant Outbursts: The Grunt of Dámaso Pérez Prado," takes up a notable detail from the mambo craze of the early 1950s: the vocal grunt of Dámaso Pérez Prado. The Cuban Pérez Prado was the agreed upon "King of Mambo," a title in what is often held up as a Cuban genre, though it paradoxically found its early audiences in Mexico City in the mid-1940s. Using the diverse manifestations of Prado's characteristic vocal grunt as a lens, the chapter grapples with how sound can be written at the same time that it asks if and how improvisation can be represented. By analyzing the grunt alongside other performative traditions of outburst, the chapter necessarily moves through locations too often left off the radar of Cuban musical history, including archival ones. I dissent from the limited view that typically positions New York City as Cuban music's only home in North America. Instead, the chapter follows mambo and Prado's grunt through the Jim Crow south, Mexico, and California. The chapter also considers Prado's movement through literature, including Jack Kerouac's travel narrative *On the Road* and the coming of age novel by the Cuban American author Achy Obejas titled *Memory Mambo*.

Chapter 4, "Visual Arrangements, Sonic Impressions: The Cuban Musical Documentaries of Rogelio París and Sara Gómez" examines two film documentaries on Cuban music made in the years following the Cuban Revolution (1963 and 1967). The films partly offer rare glimpses of the disappearing traces of the formal US presence on the island, including its official musical channels, jazz clubs, and tourist cabarets. The chapter is most interested in how the films import the sonic details of centuries of musical experimentation into the visual register. I focus on a few details from París's *Nosotros, la música* (1963) and Gómez's *Y... tenemos sabor* (1975) to reveal the creative responses to the hardening post-revolutionary cold war climate. Beyond those temporal

restraints, I look to the directors' configuration of music as an opening into the past antecedents of their vibrant and precarious present.

The fifth and final chapter, "Cold War Kids In Concert," examines recordings by Alex Ruiz, Los Van Van, and X Alfonso, and other ephemera of separation that lives in my personal archives to reflect on the different kinds of protocols necessary when listening from a distance, and the sentimental attachments that arise by way of this receptive mode. Blockades depend upon fissures: their escape routes quite literally sustain those populations most directly affected by them. I argue that music has long been a vital part of the contraband necessities for living between the United States and Cuba. The challenges of being a critic caught in these watery crossroads demand a few urgent questions: If you can't make an object available because it is illegal, or to do so would be against the law, how must you still talk about it? What are the creative and careful ways that you can engage it? Describe it? Reference it? Through the playful category I call "cold war kids," the chapter considers—and borrows—alternative channels of belonging arranged by a few other children of the cold war from Viet Nam and Korea in and outside of the United States. These undertheorized affiliations reveal how critical and artistic works can't be explained by way of the assured protocols of comparative study. My writing and interaction with the less transparent details of affiliation between these populations are part of the chapter's hopeful intervention into comparative ethnic studies. What I offer in this last chapter is a conclusion for the book and an opening for another.

I enthusiastically share Galán's embrace of possible responses to *Listening in Detail* anywhere in the neighborhood of: Bueno, ¿y qué? To which I might respond by describing the book as not an answer, but a set of heartfelt and hard-felt efforts; as not a display of expertness, but a willingness to be taken away by details. To listen in detail is a practice that is in excess of my own capacity. Adorno writes, "Music reaches the absolute immediately, but in the same instant it darkens, as when a strong light blinds the eye, which can no longer see things that are quite visible."⁸⁰ It is my hope that the book's movement through a series of musical flashes can instantaneously reveal and obscure a few meditations about Cuba of past, present, and future, in and beyond its geographical borders.