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Forgotten Histories of the AudiobookTape, Text, Speech, and Sound from Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet's Biografía de un cimarrón to Andy Warhol's a: a novel

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Forgotten Histories  
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*Biografía de un cimarrón* to  
Andy Warhol's *a: a novel*

TOM MCENANEY

In 2016 the Cuban author and ethnographer Miguel Barnet released an audio recording of himself reading selections from *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*Biography of a Runaway Slave*, 1966). The digital recording commemorated the fifty-year anniversary of a book whose authorship has long been a point of contention. While the book is usually attributed to Barnet, some editions instead list its author as Esteban Montejo, the 103-year-old former Afro-Cuban slave whom Barnet tape-recorded to compose the printed text. Those recordings have never been released. Thus Barnet's 2016 transduction of the printed

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Special thanks to the editors for their efforts and to the three anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions. Thanks also to audiences at the American Comparative Literature Association, the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present, Concordia University, the Modern Language Association, the New England Americanist Collective, Northwestern University, the University at Buffalo, and the University of California, Berkeley for their comments and questions in response to different aspects of this article. And, finally, special thanks to Raul Fernandez for acquiring a copy of Barnet's CD for me and for his other invaluable advice about and insights into Cuban music.

book into an audiobook marks a strange historical moment in the history of audiobooks in general and of *Biografía de un cimarrón* in particular. The new recording—an individual sonic reading of a printed monologue made from taped dialogues—is yet one more entextualization in the trail of texts and recordings inspired by Montejo’s voice: from the first taped conversations between Montejo and Barnet, through Hans Werner Henze’s opera *El Cimarrón* (1970) and actor Jean Vilar’s French declamation *Cimarrón* (1971), to Barnet’s recording of his own reading and the dozens of books and articles written in these objects’ wake.<sup>1</sup>

At least one question arises from this history, which scholars have somewhat surprisingly failed to ask: how would hearing the original tapes change the meaning of Barnet’s printed book? This question inspires others pertaining to objects and contexts far beyond this particular history. Does it matter that audiences have never heard the tapes of Barnet and Montejo’s conversations, and, if so, why does it matter that this book, or any other such text, was made from tape recordings? How might this book’s relation to tape ask audiences to rethink other tape works from the same period or adaptations by Henze and Vilar of the book into different media? Is there another way to entextualize, transduce, or mediate taped dialogues in text? And how else might one approach the project of tape, text, speech, and sound?

Whereas traditional audiobooks distributed on vinyl, tape, compact disc, or MP3 turn printed texts into audio recordings, *Biografía de un cimarrón* inverts this formula as part of a cohort of books from the late 1960s that used audiotape recordings as the basis for printed texts.<sup>2</sup> These texts—which include among others Barnet and Montejo’s work

<sup>1</sup> To mention just a few of these works: Roberto González Echevarría, “*Biografía de un cimarrón* and the Novel of the Cuban Revolution,” in *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 110–23; Elzbieta Sklodowska, *Testimonio hispanoamericano: Historia, teoría, poética* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992); John Beverley, “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative),” *Modern Fiction Studies* 35 (1989): 11–28; José David Saldívar, “Looking Awry at 1898: Roosevelt, Montejo, Paredes, and Mariscal,” *American Literary History* 12 (2000): 386–406; Abraham Acosta, *Thresholds of Illiteracy: Theory, Latin America, and the Crisis of Resistance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); and Jean-Pierre Tardieu, “Religion et croyance populaire dans *Biografía de un cimarrón* de Miguel Barnet ou refus à la tolerance,” *Présence Africaine: Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir* 140 (1986): 105–30.

<sup>2</sup> Among the various works connecting tape, speech, sound, and text, one might mention Dell Hymes’s “ethnopoetics”; Steve Reich’s *Different Trains*; the Firesign Theater’s experimental radio broadcasts and LPs; the Italian writer Carla Lonzi’s *Autotratto*; Bernard Alois Zimmerman’s *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter*; the “analogique graphical converter” at Argentina’s Di Tella Institute in the 1960s and the works recorded there by César Bolaños or Eduardo Costa; Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*; Jack Kerouac’s *Visions of Cody*; Allen Ginsberg’s “Wichita Vortex Sutra”; William Burroughs’s “cut-up technique”; and a long list of other artists, writers, and musicians. For recent explorations into the audiobook see Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Matthew Rubery, ed., *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies* (New York:

in Cuba, Paul Bowles and Mohammed Mrabet's *Love with a Few Hairs* (1967) in Morocco, Rodolfo Walsh's *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (Who killed Rosendo?, 1968) in Argentina, and Andy Warhol's *a: a novel* (1968) in the United States—have traditionally been divided along a North–South or East–West axis. Understood from their mode of production, however, they emerge as a coherent group of tape-recorder books, an alternative to the traditional audiobook, and texts with an often oblique relation to sound and music. They arise from the composer Bowles's ethnographic field recordings, alongside the musical repurposing of Walsh's particular tape recorder, or in relation to Warhol's role as producer for the Velvet Underground. And while these books exist in relation to ethnographic practices, they are not taken up or circulated as primarily ethnographic objects. Rather, their meaning arises through their relation to literature, music, politics, and sound technologies.

Indeed, approaching these works with sound in mind also usefully shifts the grounds for analysis, revealing how these books participate in histories of music and sonic technologies that turn them away from the binary of orality and literacy, with its familiar dogmas, and toward aurality. They can be understood as records of listening in a network that includes human physiology, tape recorders, and tape itself.<sup>3</sup> And while the main focus of this article will be on *Biografía de un cimarrón* and its closest co(n)texts, I will eventually turn to the tape-recorder books of Walsh and Warhol to examine the intersections between musical and writerly engagements with tape technology from 1966 to 1968 in order to understand how different uses of the same medium at the same time produce competing notions regarding the politics of mediating sonic reality. Taking up competing discourses of reality, fidelity, and distortion at the intersection of literary, musical, and sonic cultures, I will ultimately propose that those texts that most accurately imitated the affordances of their own tape recorders' listening—their balance between foreground and background sounds, their sensitivity to volume, their limits in reproducing a given amount of signal without distortion—undermine the documentary reality of texts that fail to account for their technological mediation. Thus, an object like Andy Warhol's *a: a novel* can emerge as a more open model for dialogic equality and literary fidelity than an overtly political work with voice such as Barnett and Montejo's *Biografía*

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Routledge, 2011); and Lytle Shaw, *Narrowcast: Poetry and Audio Research* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sterne discusses the dogmatic limits of a focus on orality versus print in relation to what he calls “the audiovisual litany.” Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sonic Production* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 16. Ana María Ochoa Gautier, building on previous work from Julio Ramos and Sterne, likewise shifts attention from orality to aurality in *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

*de un cimarrón*. In reading this alternative genealogy of the audiobook, moreover, we might also imagine hearing and making such objects differently, and re-think the politics of the listener's role in writing.

*Telling the Truth about Tape*

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the period at the center of this article, tape's meaning—as a technology that could faithfully archive evidence—capitalized on specific technological affordances, such as its physical capacity to reproduce the sounds of speech, that intersected with cultural and political beliefs about tape's truth value, which even remain prevalent for some publics today. For instance, when Donald Trump tweeted on 12 May 2017 that “James Comey better hope that there are no ‘tapes’ of our conversation,” and Comey, testifying before Congress on 8 June of the same year, declared, “Lordy, I hope there are tapes” (and then eight months later, upon the publication of his memoir, tweeted, “Lordy, this time there will be a tape. Audio book almost finished”), their exchange referenced the most notorious moment in twentieth-century US presidential corruption: Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal (1972–74) and the self-incriminating secret tape recordings that helped secure his impeachment.<sup>4</sup> (Trump's tweets, which depict tape recording as exculpatory, seemed unaware of the historical irony of this allusion.)

Later that decade Fidel Castro also employed tape recordings as part of his own archival defense when he gave a kind of “exit interview” to the soon-to-be-exiled Cuban poet Heberto Padilla. Padilla had been censored and jailed by the Cuban government following the publication of his book of poems *Fuera del juego* (Out of the game, 1968); the book had been awarded the country's highest literary prize, but drew the ire of the government, which was offended both by the book's political attitude and by its aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> In his memoir *La mala memoria* (Bad memory, 1989), Padilla recalled speaking privately with Castro, who instructed Padilla to say whatever he liked in Castro's office because Castro had decided to protect himself from what he perceived as others' lies by recording everything. As Castro told Padilla,

<sup>4</sup> Manuela Tobias, “A Timeline of Donald Trump's Talk about Nonexistent James Comey Tapes,” *Politifact*, 22 June 2017, [www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/jun/22/timeline-donald-trumps-talk-about-nonexistent-jame/](http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/jun/22/timeline-donald-trumps-talk-about-nonexistent-jame/); and Sophie Tatum, “Comey Trolls Trump: ‘Lordy, This Time There Will Be a Tape’,” *CNN*, 27 February 2018, [www.cnn.com/2018/02/27/politics/james-comey-tweet-audio-book/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2018/02/27/politics/james-comey-tweet-audio-book/index.html).

<sup>5</sup> After serving more than a month in prison, Padilla's show trial, in which he was forced to confess to writing a counterrevolutionary work, caused an international scandal for writers and artists sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution in what came to be known as the “Padilla Affair.”

None of the journalists and professors who have interviewed me have ever reproduced my literal statements. . . . So for a while now I've recorded all of my conversations with journalists and diplomats. When I write my memoirs I'll include a chapter that I'll call "Versions." I think it will be a helpful contribution for students of history. . . . And remember, if someday you talk about this conversation, know that I have it recorded [*archivada*] . . . I'll compare your version with mine.<sup>6</sup>

Tape in each of these cases was equated with fact, with an archive of truth connected to a power struggle over public and private knowledge, and with a certain claim on the real.

I use this last term, "the real," to underscore that for Nixon, Castro, and others, including the investigators and legislators who brought about Nixon's impeachment, tape's evidentiary status, its facticity, depended in part on its recognized capacity to register physical reality.<sup>7</sup> This political and juridical belief in tape's veracity derives from a number of sources, but the medium's sonic history was key to producing this trust. In the years leading up to the Cuban Revolution and Barbet's book, another revolution in sound—the age of high-fidelity—was taking place. Electronics hobbyists sought out more sophisticated components to add to their domestic turntables and tape players to increase the definition, the detail, and the precision of sound.<sup>8</sup> The introduction of magnetic tape, stereo, and multitrack recording isolated sounds in greater detail, allowing high-fidelity obsessives to test their home stereos by playing recordings of extreme sounds like steam trains, thunderstorms, and church bells, which helped the listeners adjudicate whether or not their system was properly "hi-fi."<sup>9</sup> The high-fidelity enthusiasts' ambition, which electronics companies shared and sought to exploit commercially,

<sup>6</sup> Heberto Padilla, *La mala memoria* (Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 1989), 322.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Latour, in humorous exasperation, writes, "While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices?" See Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225–48, at 227. As Latour's own juxtaposition of "real objective and incontrovertible facts" suggests, and as he asserts later, "the question was never to get *away* from the facts but *closer* to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism" (231). Indeed, Latour argues that his aim is "the cultivation of a *stubbornly realist attitude*—to speak like William James—but a realism dealing with what I will call *matters of concern*, not *matters of fact*" (231). While my argument goes in a different direction, it contributes to the shared enterprise to think of alternative models in which material cultural artifacts with evidentiary quality are not merely dismissed as infinitely deconstructable, but help form really existing social and physical communities where concerns have material consequences.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Keir Keightley, "'Turn It Down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948–59," *Popular Music* 15 (1996): 149–77, at 152.

was to make reproduction indistinguishable from live performance or, in other words, to reproduce the sonic real. Indeed, the concept of high-fidelity, which had as much to do with cultural beliefs and particular listening practices as it did with engineering innovations, inscribed a dogmatic loyalty to sonic reality into its very title.<sup>10</sup>

Critics and historians of high-fidelity in the 1950s and 1960s have exposed its masculine culture of sonic control and male domestic privacy, and revealed the ways it extended the belief in indexical reality that critics including Roland Barthes, Mary Ann Doane, Rosalind Krauss, and Friedrich Kittler have attributed to phenomena such as pre-digital photography's chemical registration of light or a gramophone groove's physical inscription of the noise of the physiological real.<sup>11</sup> More recent critical approaches to tape have sought, rightly, to distinguish its capacity for erasure, reordering, repetition, and so forth from the gramophone's archival drive to preserve the real. Yet the political examples of Nixon and Castro, as well as the opinions of many practitioners at the time, demonstrate that tape retained that gramphonic indexicality, replacing the record's grooves, at least in the imagination of its users, with the physical and material hold of magnetic tape.<sup>12</sup> In Barnet's own words, "[t]o make a text where spoken language really works it's necessary to have a tape recorder that listens to everything, that perceives everything, and serves as the impartial ear *par excellence*. Even those things that we don't want to hear, the tape recorder faithfully registers."<sup>13</sup> Again, while there is a difference between fact, as it has been elaborated by Bruno Latour, for instance, and the real as a physical property (or the Lacanian-inflected

<sup>10</sup> For a historically informed critique of the concept of fidelity see Sterne, *Audible Past*, 215–86.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction," *differences* 18 (2007): 1–6; Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October* 3 (1977): 68–81; Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Seuil, 1980); and Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> For more on the difference between tape and the gramophone see Peter McMurray, "Once upon Time: A Superficial History of Early Tape," *Twentieth-Century Music* 14 (2017): 25–48; Tom McEnaney, "No Transmitter: Clandestine Radio Listening Communities in Ricardo Piglia's *The Absent City*," *Cultural Critique* 91 (2015): 72–97; and idem, *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 193–222. For a theory of tape's indexical capacity contemporary to Barnet, see Eduardo Costa and John Perreault, "An Introduction to Tape Poems" (1969), in Eduardo Costa, *Conceptualism and Other Fictions: The Collected Writings of Eduardo Costa, 1965–2015*, ed. Patrick Greaney (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2016), 56–57. For a discussion of Costa's work with tape in relation to indexicality, see Tom McEnaney, "Real-to-Reel: Social Indexicality, Sonic Materiality, and Literary Media Theory in Eduardo Costa's Tape Works," *Representations* 137 (2017): 143–66.

<sup>13</sup> Miguel Barnet, "La Novela-Testimonio," in *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Havana: Artex, Ediciones Cubanas, 2012), Kindle, loc. 3453. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

Real that Kittler associates with the total physical information of a given sonic utterance, including those disordered sounds he labels “noise”), it matters that for the listeners, readers, writers, musicians, ethnographers, and politicians in the 1960s and 1970s, tape’s reality meant its coincidence with physical indexicality.<sup>14</sup> This afforded tape the legal power to stand as evidence, the political power to establish facts (cf. Nixon and Castro), and the social power to construct reality. Thus, it is with this history of politics, engineering, and high-fidelity culture in mind that we can better understand the consequences of tape’s connection to the real. Through the sonic history of the printed text *Biografía de un cimarrón* we will see how the tape recorder authenticates the text’s concrete reality. And ultimately, attention to the co(n)texts that have shaped—and continue to shape—how audiences hear the book will enable an alternative story about the relationships among text, sound, speech, and music.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Our Street in Havana: Two Paths for Tape*

Across the street from one another in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana are two archives dedicated to artistic production in Cuba. At the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos (UNEAC), or Cuban Writers and Artists Union, Barnet, who remains the union’s president, stored the set of reel-to-reel recordings that served as the basis for *Biografía de un cimarrón*. On the other side of the street, at the Laboratorio Nacional de Música Electroacústica, or National Laboratory of Electroacoustic Music, the composer Juan Blanco (1919–2008) used tapes themselves to make music, bypassing the symbolic mediation of the notated page. Despite the distinct uses to which these two sets of tapes were put—a printed book and musical compositions—both outputs relied equally on tape’s association with the real; as such, their creative trajectories can open our ears to the troubled borders separating speech, sound, text, and song.

<sup>14</sup> Kittler’s *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* modeled its title on Jacques Lacan’s tripartite psychoanalysis: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. The gramophone, for Kittler, is analogous to the Real because the technology registers physiological noise beyond the symbolic systems of musical notation or alphabetic writing. For more on the connections between Kittler and Lacan see Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, “Translators’ Introduction: Friedrich Kittler and Media Discourse Analysis,” in Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, xi–xxxviii.

<sup>15</sup> “Co(n)text” refers to the usage in linguistic anthropology whereby a context is not a mere container for an event or artifact, but another text that exists in a state of dialogic relation or mutual co-determination with the first mentioned text. See Michael Silverstein, “The Indeterminacy of Contextualization: When Is Enough Enough?,” in Peter Auer and Aldo Di Luzio, eds., *The Contextualization of Language* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1992), 55–75.

The relations among these borders are brought into sharp focus by the fate of the tapes for *Biografía de un cimarrón*, which have decayed over time.<sup>16</sup> The tropical humidity deteriorated the glue binding the magnetized iron oxide, which holds the tapes' recorded content, and the water droplets detached the oxide from its plastic base until there was nothing left but cracked and brittle tape reels—mere material husks whose information will never be heard again.

As the taped conversations between Barnet and Montejo decayed, the reality of the book that entextualized these sonic conversations into print became more real; its readers were now entirely reliant on its printed words. Although the book continues to derive its authenticity from the existence of the original tape-recorded interviews, the tapes of those words have never been made available to readers. As a result, in inverse proportion to the tapes' capacity for replay, the book has become the last vestige of their reality. With the chance to hear the tapes gone, the book can lay a stronger claim to being real, accurate, faithful, and authentic.

These four terms—reality, accuracy, fidelity, authenticity—matter in the reading of a book whose publication history places them in doubt. Since these interviews were first printed as a first-person narrative in 1966, the book has been alternatively referred to as a biography, novel, history, “documentary novel,” *testimonio*, and even, in its first English-language translation, an autobiography (published in 1973 as *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* by Esteban Montejo).<sup>17</sup> This proliferation of generic tags testifies to the confusion induced by the relation between tape and text, the appropriate connection between a speaker and an utterance, and the attempts to organize readers' expectations and practices when encountering the words on the page rather than via a direct recording. These labels mark, in other words, the problem of transduction, in both its sonic and linguistic understandings.

When engineers speak of transduction they mean the transformation of one form of energy into another, such as a phonograph transducing audible vibrations into the grooves on a shellac disc, grooves that can then be transduced back into audible vibrations.<sup>18</sup> The transduction of sound into printed language, however, requires an added sense of transduction that accounts for language as engineering. When linguistic

<sup>16</sup> Communication to the author from Miguel Barnet's personal assistant, 24 February 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Miguel Barnet, *Cimarrón: Historia de un esclavo* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1998); Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón: Estudios y ensayos* (Fundación Ayacucho y Banco Central de Venezuela, 2012) (referred to as “novela” in the text); and Esteban Montejo, *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Sterne, *Audible Past*, 31–35.

anthropologist Michael Silverstein invokes transduction he points to these transformational processes (his example is water at a hydroelectric dam producing electricity), but in applying the term to linguistic translation he means it to describe the reorganization of one language's cultural co(n)texts—the indexical as well as denotational meaning that comes packaged in a word—into the new semiotic organization of another language.<sup>19</sup> In the translation of *Biografía de un cimarrón* by Barnet into *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* by Montejo, we can see a linguistic-cultural transduction at work, one that registers the text's technological transduction from tape-recorded interview to printed book: who is the proper author and to whom do these words belong? Moreover, these changes in authorial attribution and generic identity socially index information about the cultures to which each belongs.

To translate/transduce the book from “biography” to “autobiography” situates the text within an African American—not Cuban nor Afro-Cuban—tradition of the “fugitive slave narrative.” Works such as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) narrate a liberal self coming into subject- and personhood through an act of literacy: the authorship of one's story and the ownership of one's self by printing and copyrighting a text.<sup>20</sup> The book's translated and transduced title, therefore, is consequential. It invokes a specific genre and a series of institutions—slavery, literature, democratic liberalism—that effectively constrain the act of speech not as part of a dialogic process of audio recording that constitutes communal grounds in the act of narration, but as the sovereign self writing itself into being.

Similar issues are at stake with each of the other generic labels that have been affixed to the text. While I have explained how the material artifact of the tapes linked the book to a discourse of the real, based in

<sup>19</sup> Michael Silverstein, “Translation, Transduction, Transformation: Skating ‘Glossando’ on Thin Semiotic Ice,” in *Translating Cultures: Perspectives on Translation and Anthropology*, ed. Paula G. Rubel and Abraham Rosman (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 75–105. Similarly, Webb Keane discusses transduction in “spirit writing,” such as the religious practice of reading entrails, which are taken as the divine material inscription and reply to human spoken questions. This crossing of semiotic modalities, the reply to speech in a medium other than speech, transforms the pragmatic functions of the indices since the signs relate to distinct ontological planes: the nonphysical divine and the visibly physical human. Keane, “On Spirit Writing: Materialities of Language and the Religious Work of Transduction,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 1–17. Closer to the sound-text relation, Ana María Ochoa Gautier studies how “the acoustic dimensions of the colonial and early postcolonial archive” in nineteenth-century Colombia “are instead dispersed into different types of written inscriptions that transduce different audile techniques into specific legible sound objects of expressive culture.” See Gautier, *Aurality*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Slaughter, “Taking Liberties: Plagiarism, Slavery, and the Making of Black Literary Property” (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association, Georgetown University, 8 March 2019).

part on a sonic culture of high-fidelity, I have yet to elaborate how these issues relate to the keywords of accuracy and authenticity. Indeed, despite the material support of the tapes, the text has been denounced by some for its historical inaccuracies, a charge opened by the denotation of at least one edition as a “history.”<sup>21</sup> This challenge to the text’s historical truth has been absorbed by the issue of authenticity. In other words, it matters less whether what Montejo told Barnet is historically accurate and matters more that a former Afro-Cuban slave spoke about his own experience. Authenticity is connected not to historical accuracy but to the accuracy of transcribing another’s voice, verified by the tapes’ existence, and to Montejo’s racialized position. This *authenticity*, rather than historical accuracy, is more closely aligned with the text’s most resonant tag (and Barnet’s own choice): the “novela-testimonio.”<sup>22</sup>

The *testimonio*, the most widely known example of which is *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia* (My name is Rigoberta Menchú, and this is the story of how my political conscience was born, 1983; translated as *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*), is a genre defined by the transformation of the author into a compiler (or what Barnet calls a “gestor,” that is a director, agent, or manager), the conversion of the liberal first-person-singular subject into the collective “we,” and the creation of a “truth effect” concerned with “sincerity” in order to establish a new type of complicity with the reader.<sup>23</sup> In apparently giving voice to a marginalized subject through the act of tape recording (a recording associated with the physical real and evidentiary fact through the cultures of high-fidelity, and a voice accurately transcribed into printed text), the *testimonio* has been thought to provide

<sup>21</sup> For more on the critique of historical inaccuracies in Barnet’s text see Rita de Maesseneer, “Miguel Barnet’s *Cimarrón*, The Real Thing? A Gastrocritical Approach,” *Afro-Hispanic Review* 30 (2011): 59–68. De Maesseneer mentions the Spanish Siruela edition, which is titled *Cimarrón: Historia de un esclavo*. She does not mention that this edition censors all passages that mention queer sexuality or use curse words.

<sup>22</sup> Miguel Barnet, “La novela-testimonio: Socio-literatura,” *Unión* 4 (1969): 99–123. See also Barnet, “La novela testimonial: Alquimia de la memoria,” *La palabra y el hombre* 82 (1992): 75–78, at 78. There exists a vast bibliography related to Latin American *testimonio* and testimonial writing and literature more broadly. For a key anthology, with several fundamental critical texts, see Georg M. Gugelberger, ed., *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996). For subsequent revisions of arguments about the social, political, and literary role of *testimonio* see Beatriz Sarlo, *Tiempo Pasado: Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2006) and Beverley’s account of Sarlo’s work in his *Latinamericanism after 9/11* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1983); Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. Elisabeth Burgos Debray, trans. Ann Wright (New York: Verso, 1992); John Beverley, “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio*” (1989), in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. George M. Gugelberger (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996): 23–41.

an authentic subaltern utterance largely undisturbed by the intervention of a hegemonic author figure or ethnographer.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the genre's most ardent proponent and theorist, John Beverley, adds this to its definition: "By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form."<sup>25</sup> Although he and others would later challenge whether or not *testimonio* should be thought of as a novel—that is, as cognate with that form and thus the reading and political practices associated with the literary institution—no one in the genre's decades-long history has questioned why *testimonio* should necessarily take printed form, nor what sound might contribute to the genre's politics, nor what occurs in the processes of entextualization that mute the spoken recordings that give rise to the book.

To begin to address these issues, we might look across calle 17 from the UNEAC, where the tapes for *Biografía de un cimarrón* lingered for so long, to the archive of the National Laboratory of Electroacoustic Music, which houses recordings from that same year, in the same format, and concerned with the same terms as these tapes, but used to apparently different ends. In contrast to the UNEAC, the National Laboratory of Electroacoustic Music, a place dedicated to ongoing experiments with electroacoustic, and later, electronic dance music, continues both to care for and to use its tapes. This archive emerged from the same context as *Biografía de un cimarrón*, where pressures to create art that might be understood as "revolutionary" brought together a public-oriented political mission with historical materialism. In fact, the context overlapped to such a degree that in the same year Barnet finished recording his interviews with Montejo, Blanco came to the UNEAC to give the first performance of electroacoustic music in Cuba: a piece he had begun to compose in 1961 titled *Música para danza*. Blanco, who, along with the avant-garde guitarist Leo Brouwer, would eventually comprise the cutting edge of Cuban music, began experimenting as early as 1942 with the design for a hybrid tape and keyboard instrument that anticipated the invention of the Mellotron by twenty years.<sup>26</sup> However, his musical direction changed definitively at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 when the Cuban novelist, musicologist, and radio technician Alejo

<sup>24</sup> Again, this idealized definition has been challenged and refined repeatedly by critics of the genre, but I am concerned here with the uptake of this object by readers, including critics and other writers, who make its meaning within and outside of academia.

<sup>25</sup> Beverley, "Margin at the Center," 24.

<sup>26</sup> Blanco had begun his career composing music that combined classical symphonic traditions with Cuban folkloric and popular music as a student of José Ardévol before turning to the electroacoustic pieces that defined his career after the start of the Cuban Revolution. Neil Leonard III, "Juan Blanco: Cuba's Pioneer of Electroacoustic Music," *Computer Music Journal* 21 (1997): 10–20.

Carpentier returned from Paris with a gift: a copy of Pierre Schaeffer's 1952 book, *A la recherche d'une musique concrète*.

As is well known, Schaeffer's thesis for a musical mode that sought to turn sounds into objects shorn of personal expression collected and theorized a number of practices that he and others, including audio engineers and fellow composers, carried out in the formation of a new musical genre: electroacoustic music.<sup>27</sup> Drawing on Rudolf Arnheim's theoretical proposition in *Radio* that the artist should discover "the musicality of sound in noise and in language," Schaeffer and his contemporaries played with a variety of recorded sounds, manipulating the speed of phonographs, playing records backwards, and, especially with the arrival of tape, cutting and pasting sections of recorded material.<sup>28</sup> Schaeffer, in particular, used these techniques and others to further detach sounds from their visible source—be it a guitar, an alarm clock, a drum, or a mouth—and thus examine such acousmatic sounds as revelations of their medium's properties, much like abstract expressionism self-reflexively considered the qualities of paint rather than the imitation of a figure.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Schaeffer's musical experiments influenced the concrete poets and artists of the 1950s. The subsequent electroacoustic music of Blanco and others helped usher in the neo-concrete movements of the 1960s.<sup>29</sup> As the Brazilian neo-concrete writer and artist Waldemar Cordeiro observed, "NC (neo-concretism) treats things like electronic music treats sounds."<sup>30</sup> The intersection between these different modes of the "concrete" have led scholars like Rachel Price to suggest that Blanco's work should be viewed alongside contemporary experiments in "concretude."<sup>31</sup> In *The Object of the*

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer Iverson explains: "Schaeffer's vivid description clarifies exactly how he got to the idea of *musique concrète*, by reappropriating the sound effects of the radio-play department. Schaeffer's work over the next two decades [the 1950s and 1960s] would decontextualize and aestheticize these previously familiar sonic objects, making them abstract by detaching them from a particular source. Electronic technologies were absolutely essential to this process. Using studio techniques such as montaging, looping, tape-reversal, and filtering, Schaeffer defamiliarized real-world sound samples. In addition, Schaeffer strove to develop a systematic way to describe the sounds' acoustical qualities and to classify and organize them accordingly." See Iverson, *Electronic Inspirations: Technologies of the Cold War Musical Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 39.

<sup>28</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 57.

<sup>29</sup> Abigail McEwen notes that "the passage from concrete to electronic and then to the combined form of 'electroacoustic' music marked a break with the *cinquillo* and the *toque de claves*, both rhythmic patterns of Afro-Cuban music; in a way not unlike Los Diez, Blanco and his peers sought to rephrase 'national' music in cubanista terms. . . . [Darié and Martínez Prado's] work with music in the 1960s marked a powerful coda to the visual history of Cuban concretism." See McEwen, *Revolutionary Horizons: Art and Polemics in 1950s Cuba* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 171.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Price, *The Object of the Atlantic: Concrete Aesthetics in Cuba, Brazil, and Spain, 1868–1968* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 171.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

*Atlantic*, which traces a hundred-year arc from “materiality to dematerialization,” from the nineteenth-century struggles for sovereignty in Cuba and Brazil to the twentieth-century rise of consumerism and the turn to neoliberalism in the wake of the 1960s, Price argues, “in the United States, the supposed dematerialization of the art object was accompanied by a rematerialization of language. But in the Brazilian context the causality was somewhat reversed.”<sup>32</sup> So what would this sound like in Cuba?

Blanco and Barnet were caught in this struggle over the values of materialization and dematerialization through their different uses of tape, but their concerns were at once differently inflected by life in revolutionary Cuba while also being connected to international projects with tape, sound, and language. Both artists found in tape a certain claim to the real, understood as a material artifact capable of indexing the physical world. At the same time, tape provided a means for them to contest their own authority and to approach the revolution’s idealized cooperation: Barnet shifted his role from author to listener and compiler, and Blanco thought of himself as more of an arranger of found sounds, an engineer who helped machines talk to each other; he registered reality rather than creating it. In doing so, Barnet and Blanco found models for revolutionary art that would not surrender the claim to the physical real so fundamental to the Cuban Revolution’s Marxist historical materialism and its desires to establish its own claim to power as the authentic voice of the people. At the same time, these new roles would also challenge the hierarchical mode of production the revolution criticized in capitalist art.

The intersection between the material real and the government’s projection of its authorized utterances (which includes official music and literature in the revolutionary state) is by no means self-evident. Indeed, as participants in the revolutionary project, Barnet and Blanco labored to create what they thought could be heard or read as authentic Cuban utterances. The question arises: if the magnetized registering of sound on tape guaranteed these works’ material reality, how would they produce authenticity? Is a voice authentic merely because it existed? Or was some other factor needed to produce that authenticity? In the words of Carpentier, Blanco brought the “authentic Cuban accent” to new sonic techniques and to contemporary world music.<sup>33</sup> This “accent,” Carpentier specified, was located in Blanco’s use of rhythm, his

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>33</sup> Carpentier would later write, “with the works of Leo Brouwer and Juan Blanco we bring our accent to contemporary world music, our accent poured into new techniques without ever losing that accent.” Carpentier, “Nuestro acento a la música contemporánea universal,” in *Ensayos selectos* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2003), 23–36, at 34.

percussive approach to tape drawn from the African influences inscribed within many Cuban song forms. Barnet, meanwhile, used his tapes to establish his document's reality but sought his marker of authenticity in the more complex social dynamics of the speech of Montejo, a man whose life traced the transformation from object to subject, from slave to revolutionary. Barnet did not transcribe Montejo's speech into the dialect forms popularized by the country's eventual national poet, Nicolás Guillén, in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>34</sup> Barnet did, however, propose Montejo's words as a living archive, ethnographically defined in his book's glossary. González Echevarría has pointed out how Montejo resists this anthropological fetishization and tokenization by speaking in the text more like "a sort of social anthropologist in his own right," as when he tells Barnet, "I've taken to looking at things from a distance."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Montejo's racialized subject position, the voice of otherness framed as speech directly registered by the tape recorder and thus apparently free of the author's mediation, authenticates Barnet's text. But in his insistence on the printed form, Barnet retains his authority and undermines Montejo's spoken discourse by requiring that he pass through the codes of the institution of literature.

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Barnet's decision to mute Montejo's voice sidestepped the complicated racial politics and ideology of sonic and literary fidelity, and placed this iconic Cuban document in the company of an international cohort of tape-recorder books from the late 1960s that created an "ethnographic realism" by transducing the sounds of others' speech into established written forms. In the case of Barnet's book, we should consider what it would mean for this document of the revolution if we were allowed to hear Montejo as a voice in dialogue with Barnet, to hear two voices on equal footing, with their competing pitches, and rhythms, pauses, and shifts in tone and volume. Barnet's own description of the tapes and his book is tantalizing in this regard. As he writes,

<sup>34</sup> Guillén, who both fit within and departed from the poetic vanguard movement known as "negrismo," which included poets like Emilio Ballagas and Félix B. Caignet in Cuba, and Luis Palés Matos in Puerto Rico, sought to imitate Afro-Cuban speech forms in poetry. Whereas these other poets' work could sometimes seem more like a stereotype of dialect speech, Guillén tried to write from within the community. Moreover, one of his most important collections of such poetry, *Motivos de son* (1930), drew from the Cuban musical genre of *son* to structure its stanzas and choruses. For more on the relationship between Guillén and *son* see Noriko Manabe, "Reinterpretations of the *Son*: Versions of Guillén's *Motivos de son* by Grenet, García Caturla, and Roldán," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 30 (2009): 115–58. For more on Guillén's work with music and dialect and its connection to Langston Hughes's work with poetry and the blues, see Vera M. Kutzinski, "Fearful Asymmetries: Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, and *Cuba Libre*," *diacritics* 34 (2004): 112–42. See also McEnaney, *Acoustic Properties*, 128.

<sup>35</sup> González Echevarría, "Biografía de un cimarrón and the Novel of the Cuban Revolution," 121.

I myself, when I listened to the recordings on my old Tesla tape recorder, I felt that that character, that voice, had a resonance, and that it transformed itself into a tremendous chorus with itself, as well as with the one who made that voice speak [*e incluso con quien la ponía a hablar*], that is to say, with the author . . . I tried to imitate Montejo's language, to bring to the page his intonation, the rise and fall of his pitch, the nuances of his language.<sup>36</sup>

And yet, despite his passion for that voice's sound, why did Barnet never release the tapes? It cannot merely be, as he has claimed, that there was too much material.<sup>37</sup> A sound editor could have helped him shape the narrative on tape. What, then, is the danger of this voice's sound, of the encounter among speech, sound, tape, and text?

One might try to hear an answer in another entextualization of Montejo's voice. In 1967, the year after the book's publication, the German composer Hans Werner Henze and the poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger came to Cuba to write the libretto and compose the operatic adaptation, *El Cimarrón*, with Brouwer on guitar. During their visit they spoke with Montejo, who would die later that year. If the book's tapes were not to be released as an audiobook, then perhaps Henze might have brought Montejo's spoken voice to the public. After all, Henze's compositions sought out the intersections between speech and music. "What I should like to achieve," he declared, "is that the music becomes language. . . . Music should be understood as speech."<sup>38</sup> Strange then that Henze, like Barnet, did not work with the material sound of that speech. Critics have argued that Henze's *El Cimarrón* "narrativizes" music by superimposing similar vocal and instrumental textures to unify or fuse "sounds and words," by mixing glossolalia, for instance, with the "noise-sounds" of instruments to signal the chaos of machinery mechanizing the slave's body on the sugar plantation, and by including Yoruba and rumba rhythms, African ritual music, a habanera, and even quotations from *West Side Story* and the US national anthem to comment on thematic elements in the story.<sup>39</sup> Within the cultural field of the Western European avant-garde, Henze's musical retelling of Montejo's story and his quotations of Cuban and US musical forms could link avant-garde

<sup>36</sup> Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Havana: Artex, Ediciones Cubanas, 2012), Kindle, loc. 2926.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Ivanka Stoianova, "'Music Becomes Language': Narrative Strategies in *El cimarrón* by Hans Werner Henze," in *Musical Signification: Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis of Music*, ed. Eero Tarasti (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 511–34, at 511.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 521. Stoianova notes that "the instrumental component, together with the fragments of verbal statements, must be considered as a sound 'commentary,' an echo that extends the signification of spoken language. The similarities of texture in the vocal and instrumental parts also play a role in sustaining the continuity of narrative enunciation."

experiments and popular song forms of the Americas with a story connected to racial oppression and revolutionary politics, a *story*, moreover, that helped Henze place narrative in and against the anti-narrative hegemony of his musical scene.<sup>40</sup>

Seen from the vantage of Cuban cultural and musical production, however, Henze's score seems like yet another tokenization of "exotic" themes and, more significantly, another insistence on policing the border between music and taped speech, one that steadfastly ignored the examples of his contemporary Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* (The soldiers, 1965) and *Requiem für einen jungen Dichter* (Requiem for a young poet, 1969).<sup>41</sup> Despite his proximity to the tape works of Blanco, some of which repurposed speech on tape—including the voices of Lenin and Castro—to make electroacoustic music, Henze opted for a German baritone to sing Montejo's words.<sup>42</sup> Filtering Montejo's voice through the symbolic representational system of Enzensberger's libretto and his own score, Henze eschewed the indexical affordances of tape; the sonic materiality of Montejo's voice remained silent while it continued to produce texts.

If Henze had recorded Montejo's voice to incorporate in his work, or if Barnet and Blanco had met crossing calle 17 and decided to collaborate, we might have heard a version of the book on tape that approximated Blanco's "Desde su voz amada" (1970/1979) or *Viet Nam* (1967). The latter piece—"a four-track magnetic tape recording that used electronically produced sounds and the manipulated recordings of speeches by Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Min, Ernesto Guevara, and Robert McNamara in their original voices; the words of Nguyen Van Troi when facing the firing squad; and two Vietnamese tonal songs"—was performed for "an audience of fifteen thousand people placed in the center of a 25,200-square-foot rectangle that had thirty-seven speakers around it."<sup>43</sup> This massive experience of an electroacoustic composition with overt political content emphasized the revolution's belief in militant engagement through art by amplifying these recorded voices in an egalitarian musical event that aligned them with the Cuban context. In Marysol Quevedo's words, "Blanco's works were steeped in the political context of revolutionary

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Thanks to Elaine Kelly for pointing me to this work.

<sup>42</sup> Blanco's other works with voice and tape include *Poema espacial No. 3* (Viet-Nam) from 1968, *Contrapunto espacial No. 3* from 1969, and *Desde su voz amada: Homenaje a Lenin* from 1970. The latter two are included on his self-titled LP released by EGREM, LD 3809, La Habana, Cuba, 1979.

<sup>43</sup> Marysol Quevedo, "Experimental Music and the Avant-Garde in Post-1959 Cuba: Revolutionary Music for the Revolution," in *Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America*, ed. Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 251–78, at 274.

Cuba; they were a ‘singularly Cuban’ solution to the question of how new music could serve a socialist society.”<sup>44</sup> Establishing a clear alternative to Barnet’s book, the voices could exist on tape and reach audiences far beyond the printed page all at once.

Like *Viet Nam*, “Desde su voz amada” repurposed spoken words on tape for a massive audience. Originally presented in 1970 and played for weeks on thirty-six loudspeakers on the streets of the Havana entertainment district known as La Rampa, “Desde su voz amada” uses Lenin’s voice as its main instrument.<sup>45</sup> That Lenin’s voice would dominate the soundscape of a district that little over a decade before was the heart of capitalist Havana must have been music to the ears of the revolutionary government, although the composition itself is a hard fit with the *nueva trova*, *son*, or other Cuban musics endorsed by the government and population alike at the time. The work opens with Lenin’s voice so slowed and drenched in reverb that it sounds like a haunting, roaring wind tunnel with occasional shrieks. At the four-minute mark, Lenin’s words become recognizable as words, albeit words spoken from the bottom of a well. Two minutes later, the reverberation ceases, and his voice becomes more defined and increases in volume, as if momentarily emerging from the depths of the past. Then his words are rapidly looped as if history has fallen in on itself, and the resulting layers of sound evoke an uproarious crowd, manic with cheering applause. Although Blanco would disavow his support for Lenin in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the devastating loss of subsidies for Cuba, the composition remains an achievement that makes music of the indexical character of the voice’s material properties on tape. It seems a bold alternative to Henze’s German baritone, one that promises to find in tape a means to make very different use of those intonations, changes in pitch, and linguistic nuances that Barnet heard in Montejo’s voice and tried to transduce in print from his Tesla tape recorder.

While Barnet has never released these tapes, he did record himself reading Montejo’s words fifty years after the original conversations took place. The resulting recording, *50 Años de Cimarrón* (released on CD by Cuba’s EGREM label in 2016), reinforces Barnet’s authorial responsibility for the words and sounds by bearing his name on the cover. One might hear this recording as an attempt to resolve the ongoing problem Montejo’s voice presents for his literary, anthropological, and musical

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> For mention of the track’s original performance on La Rampa, see M. Laura Novoa, “Listening to Cultures in Conflict: The Politics of Sound in Buenos Aires in the 1960s,” trans. Tamara Stuby, *parallax* 20 (2014): 303–19, at 316n2; and Torsten Eßer and Patrick Frölicher, eds., “*Alles in meinem Dasein ist Musik . . .*”: *Kubanische Musik von Rumba bis Techno* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2004), 422.

listeners by newly embedding the words Barnet transduced in print into a musical co(n)text.<sup>46</sup> Nine songs alternate with eight selections from the book, with each song drawn from the *Cantos Yoruba de Cuba* (Yoruba songs from Cuba) by Héctor Ángulo, who transcribed dozens of such songs collected by the Cuban composer and musicologist Argeliers León. These musical performances sometimes align with the CD's structure and other times seem connected only by their relation to the spiritual traditions that Montejo references in the book.<sup>47</sup> The opening track, the sacred song "Elise Baluandé," which forms part of a Palo ceremony of ritual purification through the sacrifice of a rooster as an offering to the "prenda," or physical embodiment of a soul, is followed by two songs on guitar dedicated to the orisha, or deity, Eleguá, traditionally invoked to "open the roads."<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, the penultimate track, "Iya mi ilé," relates to the orisha Ochún, the deity of the rivers, who is usually praised at the conclusion of the *güemilere*, a ritualized musical moment when believers are "mounted" or possessed by orishas at the close of a santo ceremony.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in their evocation of Afro-Cuban religious practices, the musical tracks in this hybrid audiobook lend a divine structure to Barnet's reading, a structure that reinforces the syncretic spiritual statements Montejo makes in the text.

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Within this framework, Barnet's selections from the text offer yet another *reading* of the book. That is, they are both a sonic entextualization that once again alters the co(n)texts of the printed words, and an interpretation—an abridged edition that compresses the book into chosen excerpts. In many of the selections, Barnet's sonic performance barely changes in pitch, pace, or inflection, and the effect directs attention away from any sonic qualities or added value. His first and last readings on the recording are from the beginning and end of the book respectively. The first reading spans from Montejo's opening statement "Hay cosas que yo no me explico de la vida" (There are things about life that I can't explain) to the famous lines "Por cimarrón no conocía a mis padres. Ni los vide siqueira. Pero eso no es triste porque es la verdad" (As a runaway slave, I never knew my parents. I never even saw them. But that's not sad

<sup>46</sup> Miguel Barnet, *50 años de Cimarrón*, EGREM 1401, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> I am indebted to Raul Fernandez for his expert guidance in explaining the religious meanings of these songs here and in the remaining references to Palo musical traditions.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the "Elise Baluandé" see Jorge Castellanos and Isabel Castellanos, *Cultura Afrocubana*, vol. 3, *Las religiones y las lenguas* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1992), 156–61.

<sup>49</sup> For more on music and Afro-Cuban spiritual practice see Katherine J. Hagedorn, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2001).

because it's the truth).<sup>50</sup> The final reading runs from Montejo's description of US troops harassing a Cuban woman in the wake of the Spanish-American war or Cuban War of Independence of 1898, through his comparison of Cuban generals Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo, to his closing declaration of freedom and action: "Por eso digo que no quiero morirme, para echar todas las batallas que vengan. Ahora, yo no me meto en trincheras ni cojo armas de esas de hoy. Con un machete me basta" (That's why I say I don't want to die, so that I can fight in all the battles yet to come. Now, I'm not going to get into the trenches or use any new weapons. A machete will do).<sup>51</sup> While more could be said about both of these readings—not least Montejo's reflections on the spiritual world in the first reading, his preferencing of Afro Cuban leader Antonio Maceo over Gómez, and, perhaps, the representation of the US soldiers' speech ("Foky, foky, Margarita") in the final reading—they gain little in their sonic performance, and mainly serve to emphasize Montejo's trajectory from slave to freedom fighter and his criticism of the United States, which fits neatly into the authorized message of the Cuban Revolution in 1966 and today.<sup>52</sup>

Barnet's other readings also follow the book's order; there are moments, however, that are remarkable for their attention to sound and for Barnet's slight deviations from the text in an otherwise flat vocal performance. At the structural core of the album, on tracks four and five (from minute twenty-two to forty-five in a sixty-seven-minute CD), Barnet focuses on three scenes of sound. The first of these emphasizes Montejo's fear of making sound—"Yo me cuidaba de todos los ruidos" (I was careful about all of the sounds that I made)—and his prohibition on speech: "Por mucho tiempo no hablé una palabra con nadie" (For a long time I didn't speak a single word with anyone).<sup>53</sup> Sound, in both the text and the performance, assumes importance as Montejo's ear,

<sup>50</sup> All quotations from the text (but not the essays included in some editions of the text) come from the 1980 Cuban facsimile edition of the first 1966 edition: Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980), here 17 and 20. Barnet claims that when the German playwright Peter Weiss read these lines, he insisted that they were fictionalized by Barnet and that Montejo could not have uttered them: "Peter Weiss left my place in a state of ecstasy and he refused to believe me, even after I repeatedly insisted, that that sentence of Esteban's—'Because I was a runaway slave I never knew my parents, but that's not sad because it's true'—was actually Esteban's words and not mine. He told me, 'No, you wrote that.' I told him, 'No, Peter, no.' But he didn't believe me. That wise sentence, so full of stoic content, has become the *leitmotiv* of the book." See Barnet, "Los caminos del *Cimarrón*," in *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Havana: Artex, Ediciones Cubana, 2012), Kindle, loc. 2834.

<sup>51</sup> Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 207.

<sup>52</sup> Montejo says this of Gómez and Maceo: "La diferencia estaba en que Gómez miraba para el norte y Maceo para el pueblo" (The difference was that Gómez looked to the north [the US] and Maceo looked to the people) (*ibid.*, 207).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 and 48.

carefully attuned to the noises of pursuit, transforms into an acutely sensitive instrument to register the sounds of bats, birds, human voices, and songs: as Montejo listens, he becomes an ornithologist and ethnographer rather than a hunted man.

In the subsequent section from the book included on the same track, a passage dedicated to voiced animals and mechanical sounds, Barnet's voice begins to play with pitch and rhythm, imitating the onomatopoeic words of the printed page. As if awakened to the text's sonic possibilities, he begins to add words and repeat phrases for emphasis. For example, in the closing sentences of "La vida en el monte" (Life in the woods), Montejo comes across an old woman whom he asks, "Dígame, ¿es verdad que ya no somos esclavos?" (Tell me, is it true that we're no longer slaves?), to which the woman replies, "No, hijo, ya somos libres" (No, child, we're free). On the recording, Barnet introduces repetition to allow his listeners to register the impact of the moment, rendering the woman's reply as "No, no, hijo, ya somos libres, ya somos libres." Finally, carrying the drama of this declaration into the chapter's closing sentence, Barnet pauses before slowly delivering the line: "Yo estuve años y años sin conversar a nadie" (I went for years and years without talking to anyone).<sup>54</sup> This sentence, which anticipates a story told on the following track that concludes with the moral to listen rather than speak, ironically thematizes Barnet's appropriation of Montejo's words and Montejo's wariness of speech throughout the book: "¡A cuántas gentes no tienen que caerles bichos en la boca por la lengua tan suelta!" (How many people end up with bugs in their mouth from always wagging their tongues!).<sup>55</sup> This phrase carries meaning throughout the recording. In the process of tape-recording the interviews for *Biografía de un cimarrón* Barnet seems to have remained faithful to this lesson in his insistence on his role of author as being primarily that of a listener. The shift from aural to oral in *50 Años de Cimarrón*, however, exposes the limited extent to which Barnet actually granted Montejo agency; the absent tapes silently and somewhat sadly resonate throughout the performance. Barnet's voice, a more forceful substitution, turns us back to the text to ask if there is another path from tape to text, or at the intersection of sound and script.

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*Faithful Distortion: An Alternative History of Tape and Text*

Around the same time that Barnet recorded Montejo on tape, Rodolfo Walsh, who would become one of Argentina's most celebrated writers

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 154.

and political activists, stepped off a plane in Corrientes, Argentina, with his tape recorder in hand. In the previous decade Walsh had served a stint as an amateur and accidental cryptographer in Havana during the months before the Bay of Pigs invasion, and worked in Buenos Aires as a translator of English-language crime novels, a journalist, and prize-winning author of detective fiction in his own right; he pioneered the “true crime” genre with his book *Operación Masacre* (*Operation Massacre*), which was published in 1957, eight years before Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. By 1967 he was searching for new means to engage with and share the stories of others. To do so, he turned to the new technology of tape recording. “Rodolfo’s tape recorder was our best ambassador [in Corrientes],” the author and radical defense lawyer Eric “Peco” Tissembaum reported years later. “After recording someone, [Rodolfo] would let people who’d never experienced a recording, and who’d never seen a recorder, listen to part of what they’d said. That opened every door for us.”<sup>56</sup> The portable tape recorder not only opened doors for Walsh and Tissembaum on that visit to Corrientes; as with Barnet’s work, it opened doors for literature as well. Walsh’s recordings of people persecuted by Argentine corruption were as much a new experience for the history of the novel as they were for the speakers who heard their voices played back to them on his tape recorder. A year after the trip to Corrientes, Walsh used the recordings he had made to compose the third in his trilogy of true crime denunciations, *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (Who killed Rosendo?), a book of nonfiction that continued his attempt to bring criminals to justice through texts that interwove reportage with the techniques of *noir* fiction. For Walsh, this mode of narration, which, he said, “one writes at the pace of the machine,”<sup>57</sup> would respond to what he saw as the formation of different publics, a generation that would recognize “el testimonio” (testimonial writing) and “la denuncia” (denunciations) as work worthy of the same prestige as the novel.

A new medium for a new public, Walsh’s tape-recorder book was also the means to include new publics in literature. In the Argentine novelist and critic Ricardo Piglia’s estimation, Walsh used the tape recorder to resolve the fundamental tension in literary history between writing and orality, “because with the tape recorder the words that are other (*ajenas*) to the literate world (*al mundo letrado*) seem to be registered immediately.”<sup>58</sup> Thus the tape recorder, according to Piglia, would transform literary

<sup>56</sup> Eric Tissembaum interviewed by Raúl S. Vinokurov, *Diario Norte*, 27 December 2014, [www.diarionorte.com/articulo/116698/](http://www.diarionorte.com/articulo/116698/).

<sup>57</sup> Rodolfo Walsh, *Cuentos completos*, ed. Ricardo Piglia (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la flor, 2013), 512.

<sup>58</sup> Ricardo Piglia, “El punto ciego de la experiencia,” *Revista La Granada* 1 (July 2013).

history and finalize the creation of “no-ficción,” or nonfiction, whose own field of representation, Piglia says, “can’t be moved into fiction without producing a distortion effect (*un efecto de distorsión*).”<sup>59</sup>

In this concise analysis, Piglia condenses the paradoxical utopia of new media, from the neorealist theories of André Bazin to the sloganeering of AT&T (“reach out and touch someone”), Oculus (“making virtual reality a reality”), and onwards: only more, newer, and different media will grant us access to the immediacy of experience. This theory of the “vanishing mediator,” in which the immediate arises from the mediated, occurs because, in Piglia’s terms, words are now “registered” by a receptive machine rather than shaped by the intervening consciousness of the authorial pen.<sup>60</sup> Much like the move from nonfiction to fiction produces what Piglia calls “a distortion effect,” any author’s written intervention would “distort” the signal of orality.<sup>61</sup> Although Walsh never released his tapes and edited his recordings into a text that largely eschews transcription in favor of his authorial style, Piglia nevertheless rewrites Walsh’s work under the sign of fidelity: Walsh’s nonfiction is guaranteed as accurate and real (in that juridical/political sense) because it began on tape; it immediately, in Piglia’s opinion, registered the other’s words.

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Yet, as with Barnet, much of the critical scholarship on Walsh’s “denunciations” or testimonial writing examines the ways in which these circuits of symbolic mediation between speaker and writer inscribe the various forms of power that are written into the literary institution, and the unequal relationships among author, compiler, narrator, and subject.<sup>62</sup> Without repeating the earlier claims around testimonial discourse, Walsh’s text and Piglia’s analysis provide a point of departure in order to consider not just the symbolic “distortion” Piglia mentions, but also the material distortion of Walsh’s particular tape recorder: the *Geloso G-257*. Indeed, focusing on the 1960s context in which Walsh began using the tape recorder moves the discussion from the relationship between orality

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. I have chosen the awkward translation “distortion effect” because it resonates with Barthes’s “reality effect,” which Piglia likely intends readers to think of in this circumstance.

<sup>60</sup> Sterne, *Audible Past*, 218.

<sup>61</sup> In his essay “El arte de la distorsión” (2009), the Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vásquez proposes that a critical rereading of “magical realism” in Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967) “distorts” the received history of that novel’s meaning and influence and thereby opens up new creative space for Latin American (and especially Colombian) writers after García Márquez. “Distortion,” in this case, is not a sonic phenomenon, but it corresponds to how Piglia sees Walsh intervening in Argentine, Latin American, and world literary debates about literary form and genre. See Juan Gabriel Vásquez, “El arte de la distorsión,” *Letras libres*, 13 January 2007, [www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/el-arte-la-distorsion](http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/el-arte-la-distorsion).

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Ángel Rama, “Rodolfo Walsh: La narrativa en el conflicto de las culturas,” in *Literatura y clase social* (México, DF: Folios Ediciones, 1983), 195–230.

and literature to that between sound and literature. This is useful for considering Walsh's contention that he turned to the tape recorder because a new generation and a new public needed a new form to combine politics and aesthetics.

With the aforementioned history of high-fidelity culture in mind, it makes particular sense that Rodolfo Walsh, himself an electronics hobbyist who once rewired his television set to capture radio calls from his local police station, would have turned to the portable Geloso G-257 recorder—produced at the height of the high-fidelity craze—to authorize or authenticate his true-crime denunciations.<sup>63</sup>

Despite Piglia's claims and Walsh's intentions, we have to ask what Walsh leaves out or transforms in his move to print, and what it would mean to consider the sound of his recorder in the printed text. Two answers emerge from the context of 1968 that look to distortion as the grounds to establish a new notion of fidelity and provide an alternative model to the stories of *Biografía de un cimarrón*. As we will hear, Barnet and Walsh (and Piglia, by extension) paradoxically distort "the voice of the other" because they fail to incorporate the noise of their recorders, the sound of how those recorders listen. Distortion, in other words, provides a different way to hear the politics of fidelity in these works.

In the same year that Walsh published *Rosendo*, the Argentine band Manal inaugurated *rock nacional* with the sound of distortion. In the absence of access to the Marshall and Fender amplifiers driving US and British rock, Manal introduced distortion in songs such as "Que pena me das" (You're such a pain, 1968) through a simple manipulation of the same type of tape recorder used by Walsh, the Geloso G-257.<sup>64</sup> On examination of the Geloso's instruction manual, Manal's guitarist Claudio Gabis realized that he could exploit the recorder's specific engineering and repurpose, "hack," or "circuit bend" it into an amplifier. The recorder's microphone input was built to handle an intermediate signal—the sound of a human voice—but when Gabis plugged his electric guitar directly into the Geloso and turned up the volume, the signal exceeded the recorder's capacity. Consequently, the Geloso distorted the guitar sound and its small speaker burst forth exactly the kind of "authentic" blues sound that Gabis associated with Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, and others, and was unable to produce through the amplifiers that were available in Argentina at the time.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Walsh's rewiring was mentioned to the author by the writer and journalist María Moreno in conversation on 5 August 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Other bands quickly followed suit with distortion being used similarly in songs such as Los Gatos's "La chica del paraguas," also from 1968.

<sup>65</sup> In *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), Bryan Wagner argues that white listeners heard the

At the same time, Andy Warhol introduced just this notion of distortion into his printed text.<sup>66</sup> It might seem odd, and even offensive, to compare Warhol, the icon of pop irony, with Walsh, the sincere militant, although it might seem less peculiar when we consider both were shot for their beliefs, albeit one by regime assassins and the other by a poet and theorist. There is no doubt that Walsh and Warhol turned to tape with different aims. In a 1970 interview with Piglia, Walsh insists that readers not approach *Rosendo* as a novel, fearing that the category would defang his denunciation and instead sacralize it as art.<sup>67</sup> Warhol, on the other hand, was so emphatic that readers recognize his transcription of tape-recorded conversations with Robert “Ondine” Olivo as a novel, indeed as a novel he equated with James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, that he published the book with the genre written into the title: *a: a novel*. Both Warhol and Walsh were wrestling with the issue of what new forms could be developed that would be appropriate to the new publics emerging from the changing conditions of culture and capital. While Walsh railed against the novel as a category, his book followed the ill-defined outlines of the genre that Henry James called “large loose baggy monsters.”<sup>68</sup> Warhol, on the other hand, brought the tape recorder into the novel form. Whereas Walsh only gives readers ten pages of transcribed and edited recordings in a nearly 200-page book, Warhol had his entire 450-page novel transcribed by amateur typists and laid out by his assistant Billy Name in order to be faithful to the distorted mode of listening produced by his portable tape recorder, the Norelco Carry-Corder 150, which he repeatedly referred to, with all the pop irony of post-1950s domestic fidelity, as “his wife.”

The sound of this tape recorder mattered for the text. As Gustavus Stadler tells us:

treated as a listener, the cassette recorder is compatible with Warholian listening because it doesn’t get overly focused. . . . [It] can’t very effectively separate sounds to create the impression of space. . . . Cassette

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phonograph’s noise, its “hisses, pops, and clicks” (219), as a sign of authenticity that “captured” the sound of blackness that had escaped their systems of musical notation (194). The record’s very sonic infidelity—its noise—matched the resistance to written notation white listeners heard in black voices, and thus phonography, in Wagner’s formulation, created black subjectivity for white auditors. As he argues, “from the point of reproduction, the black voice’s primary effects became indistinguishable from their technological condition of possibility, and this led to a situation where, for the first time in its history, the music could be commonly considered as folklore on the grounds that it was indexed directly to the individual consciousness of its producer. . . . The aura is made, not destroyed, by the phonograph” (194).

<sup>66</sup> For a more extended treatment of the ways in which Warhol works among tape, text, music, and sound, and the complex sonic cultures associated with different renderings of tape sound in different genres, see Judith Peraino’s article in this issue.

<sup>67</sup> Walsh, *Cuentos completos*, 511.

<sup>68</sup> Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (1890; New York: Penguin, 1995), x.

recordings are drenched in the sound of the atmosphere in which the recording is taking place . . . [and] bathed in the drone of the machine's own motor, a distortion of any ideal of purity in sound reproduction that depends on the silencing of technological mediation.<sup>69</sup>

Although Warhol's own mode of audition, in both senses of the word, certainly affects what he captures on the recorder, he approaches a more faithful rendering of the tape recorder's own atmospheric listening and occasional failure to distinguish between background and foreground noise, one voice and another, when he steps away from the transcription process and passes the tapes through another set of ears: the book's amateur typists. Their typographical errors and misattributions render in print the very distortion of the recorder's listening. While Barnet, as I mentioned near the outset of this article, insisted that "to make a text where spoken language really works it's necessary to have a tape recorder that listens to everything, that perceives everything, and serves as the impartial ear *par excellence*," his own text failed to follow his tape recorder's model. With Warhol, on the other hand, such fidelity to the sound of the recording process—including its distortion—reveals the high literariness of those tape-recorder books in the *testimonio* tradition that would otherwise foreswear their status as a novel or insist on their books as records of an "impartial ear." While Barnet or Walsh propose the tape recorder as an almost unmediated access to the voices of their subjects, these compilers filter those voices into narrative arcs or *noir* modalities. Surprisingly, Warhol seems to come closest to the ethnographic ideal of listening openly to the voice of the other.

### *Forgotten Histories of Listening*

Such faithful distortion, which Warhol foregrounded in his work as producer for the Velvet Underground's 1967 debut album, is absent in both Walsh and Barnet's work, where tape stands as the sign of an accurate transcription of words rather than sound. Yet, including Warhol and his sonic method alongside and in dialogue with his Latin American tape-recorder contemporaries reveals a new dimension in the familiar stories told about these texts when they are divided along a North–South axis. Whereas critical audiences tend to think of Warhol's text as a book far removed from the committed concerns of political engagement, we miss much if we dismiss it as an extension of the literary style that Georg Lukács strangely named "naturalism" and attacked as the mere

<sup>69</sup> Gustavus Stadler, "'My Wife': The Tape Recorder and Warhol's Queer Ways of Listening," *Criticism* 56 (2014): 425–56, at 439–40.

registration of fragments of reality he found in Joyce's *Ulysses*,<sup>70</sup> a book, admittedly, that Warhol thought of as a model for his *a: a novel*. For while Lukács's arguments in favor of a heroic narrator or author's authority to shape the material of "immediate experience" and go beyond "phonographically exact imitations of life" have long inspired left readings of engaged literature, they look different when that experience or life is another's voice.<sup>71</sup> To endorse Barnet's narrative manipulation of Montejo's taped words in *Biografía de un cimarrón* might fit with Lukács's ambitions for literature and with tape's nonphonographic affordances: its more easy splicing and montage that the testimonial writers of the late 1960s ignored or downplayed. However, to support Barnet's authorial prerogative over and above Montejo's physical words would entail muting the sound of a racialized and marginalized subject's voice, a practice that runs counter to the politics of racial equality and empowerment such a text would seem to uphold. Indeed, the mode of audition and production in Warhol's text presents a method that disturbs the categories of accuracy, authenticity, and fidelity so often ascribed to *testimonio* and its exemplary texts like *Biografía de un cimarrón*. Warhol, in other words, helps us hear what is not there in the printed text of *Biografía de un cimarrón*, and to ask why the missing sounds matter.

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On the other hand, Barnet and Walsh's books reveal a political dimension to works of concrete art in the visual and musical realm and, in concert with Warhol's text, tune audiences in to a mid-century mode of listening that depended on the new technology of the tape recorder, extending earlier challenges, such as those of Harry Partch, and anticipating later experiments on the thresholds between speech and music such as Steve Reich's *Different Trains*. Warhol's novel, in other words, gains a political edge when one reads its enxtextualiztion from sound to print in concert with the co(n)texts of his Latin American contemporaries.

Taken together, the tape-recorder books of Barnet, Walsh, and Warhol bring forward the limits of print and, in the case of *Biografía de un cimarrón*, ask us to imagine the audiobook we do not have, an audiobook that could have borrowed from the example of Blanco's *Viet Nam* or "Desde su voz amada" and could have blurred the edges separating technology, ethnography, literature, and music. We could hear today those intonations in Montejo's voice, his imitations of birds or bats, and the pitch of his voice in conversation with Barnet rather than rendered in monologue. We could hear an audiobook that joined speech and music at their meeting point in sound, through electroacoustic engagements

<sup>70</sup> Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," in *Aesthetics and Politics* (New York: Verso Books, 1980), 28–59, at 34, 39–40. See also Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

<sup>71</sup> Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," 39.

with the properties of Montejo's voice, in sonic narratives ready to amplify the aural qualities of these stories to study the artful, acoustic arrangement of talk. Without that imagined audiobook, however, we can still listen through history to listen differently now, to hear the intersection of text and music as an opportunity to compose new kinds of sonic objects, and to seek out other ways to listen as readers. To listen to Barnett with Blanco, Walsh with Manal, and Warhol with the Velvet Underground, is to hear an alternative, audible but ignored, history of the forgotten stories of the tape-recorder book and perhaps a different sonic future for the audiobook.

### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the different affordances of magnetic tape and print as they are entextualized in various co(n)texts by writers, ethnographers, and musicians throughout the Americas in the late 1960s. I analyze printed books made from tape recordings—Cuban anthropologist Miguel Barnett and his interview subject Esteban Montejo's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*Biography of a Runaway Slave*, 1966), Rodolfo Walsh's true-crime denunciation *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (*Who killed Rosendo?*, 1968), and Andy Warhol's experimental *a: a novel* (1968)—to ask why these writers transduced their recordings into print rather than release them as audiobooks, how or if listening to those tapes would alter the meaning of their printed entextualizations, and what musical interactions with the same media in the same contexts can tell us about the limits both of print and of symbolic musical notation. Tracing the intersection of musical and literary works, the article argues that a writerly ethics of distortion, rather than fidelity, arises from this mutual encounter with sound on tape, and ponders how dialogic audiobooks might contest older issues of power and representation for those writers, North and South, who worked in support of marginalized (Afro-Cuban, working class, and queer) subjects.

Keywords: tape, sound studies, *testimonio*, transduction, distortion, fidelity, audiobooks, aurality