

Ana María Ochoa Gautier. *Aurality: Listening & knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. xiii + 266 pp. \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-5736-0; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-5751-3.

In recent years, terms such as *illegal*, which slipped into popular usage to describe certain persons living within the United States, have only just been deemed unacceptable, for no person should be considered illegal. This reductive approach to classifying persons living within a geographical space is founded on a limited understanding of the historical and political processes that provoked the movement of peoples at crucial times during the building of the nation; processes that would ultimately assist in a better understanding of who American peoples are. And questions pertaining to American citizenship and identity make up much of cultural conversations within the United States today: Where is an American from? What does s/he look like? What language(s) does s/he speak? What does s/he sound like? More importantly, who is not an American? The answers to these questions are not easily ascertained, especially through the lens of critical theories, which name and operate under their own particular biases. Perhaps, to be somewhat provocative, these questions are best answered by persons who exist outside of the United States and who live in foreign territories.

It is thus in answer to questions surrounding identity, the need for more inclusive and constructive ways of understanding history, and the need for a case study by which discourse pertaining to identity in the United States can be patterned that we read Anna María Ochoa Gautier's work, *Aurality: Listening & Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Though she focuses on nineteenth-century Colombia, Gautier's work provides an example of an adoptable way of reframing notions of personhood as linked to geophysics and geophilosophy, and provides a retelling of history by using the subjectivity of sound. Gautier's work therefore contributes to approaches to critical theory that rely on sound (considered the "auditory turn"), rather than, say, dogmatic chronology, to understand cultural phenomena. In her work, by using notions of voice to blur the lines between the human and non-human, Gautier ultimately presents a more comprehensive and truthful telling of Colombian history. She also provides a complete understanding of the oral, and the aural.

The mechanics and processes contained in aurality, then, inform the critical approach to her work. The main aims here, which are at once quite ambitious and innovative, focus on investigating the effect of the inclusion and exclusion of local aural expressions (of non-lettered peoples, of the unpopular, of the popular, of the nonhuman, of the outsider, of the native) at a crucial time in Colombia's history: the (long) nineteenth century in Colombia, where the nation defended her language and her national pride and revealed herself to her neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean. Gautier's investigation of listening practices ("audile techniques") is the research lens through which she problematizes the phenomenon of the acoustic and the voice. One of her most lasting points, which serves as a great preface to understanding her work, is that at this pivotal time in Colombian history, voice constructed itself between culture and nature, and as such, now provides a framework for defining and conceptualizing both entities.

The entities that make up her first chapter are boat rowers of the Magdalena River in Colombia, these are the sound-makers, and the persons listening (and interpreting) the sounds are, as she lists them, Creoles, Europeans, Afro descendants and other indigenous groups. By studying the varied reception of the boat rowers sounds by these different peoples, Gautier unearths varying understandings of the term voice and how it relates (or does not relate) to human identity, but more so with the relationship between the human and the non-human.

Her second chapter uses sounds coming up from popular songs. The writings of José María Vergara y Vergara (1831-1872) are used as the lettered manifestation of the listening to these songs. Her study of the aural relationship between the songs and Vergara y Vergara's work reveals the

politics of listening that privileged certain sounds within oral texts, while excluding others. These songs, which she considers manifestations of nation-building, reveal within this systemic silencing, the issues of blood purity, and racial and religious conflict that shaped Columbia's history.

Next, Gautier's focus shifts to indigenous peoples (and their language) as the sound-makers, and ethnographers (those who transcribe the indigenous language) as the listeners. In a very fascinating chapter, Gautier gives the reader a novel view of the process of transforming oral text into an alphabetized writing system, which is unable to fully transcribe the richness of sounds within the spoken language. It is this inability to transcribe, and not the inability to say, that sparks Gautier's interest. And at the center of this process is the ear, which must listen to the oral stimulus it receives and must either hear or *unhear* the voice of the schooling in grammar and linguistics that would try to subject the sound to a certain ontology. Gautier problematizes the relationship of the ear between indigenous and non-indigenous people, stating that this relationship is essential to understanding the collective identity of the nation.

Finally, Gautier looks at orality, defining it as a history of scholarly discourse centered on a paradoxical conceptualizing of the voice: subjecting the anatomy of voice to processes that, under the guise of creating the civilized person, rob the voice of its dynamism. These processes, for Gautier, are bound up in notions of eloquence, orthography, and etymology. What is more is the distinction made between levels of personhood based on the oral performances of the speakers. Gautier concludes that the constant use of the voice as a way of classifying persons (as the other, for example) and also as a means of rescuing and restoring the other to a place of properness had a fundamental impact on how communities within Latin America and the Caribbean consider what is appropriate, accepted and popular.

As an investigation into the exclusion of local expression at crucial points in the creation of the nation of Colombia, Gautier easily achieves her goal. And hers is a loud work that includes the confluence of varied texts to deconstruct the fundamental notions of personhood and citizenship. As such, her work, similar to the dynamism of voice, is not easily contained in any one discipline. In fact, this work contributes to the fields of musicology (ethnomusicology), linguistics (sociolinguistics), history, politics, and many areas within performance studies.

I believe that this work would be an ideal candidate for support from areas within the digital humanities. Being a rich text that focuses on notions of voice and listening, and linking these to geophysical and geophilosophical spaces, a project that would include, but not limit itself to mapping and embedded audio material (using the transliterated sounds in Gautier's work) would be most fruitful. On its own, Gautier's work is tremendously useful. A challenging and rewarding read, I recommend her work to persons who are seriously interested in new approaches to retelling the history of any nation.