Mexican Rarities, *Disco pirata*, and the Promise of a Sound Archive of Postnational Memory

Hay que "tocar" a los documentos, parafraseo ahora,
como si fueran las teclas de un piano.

(You have to "touch/play" the documents, I paraphrase now, as if they were the keys of a piano.)

—Cristina Rivera Garza, *Los muertos indóciles* (2013)

After looking for him for several hours, Luz María finds Memo in an alley outside La Estrella, one of Tijuana's most iconic working-class dance halls. Memo was robbed during his first night in the city and is now without money to pay for the node job he needs in order to join the transnational workforce that would allow him to send money to his family in Santa Ana del Río, Oaxaca. *Nodes* are high-tech gadgets that, implanted in their bodies, enable individuals to directly connect their brains to a series of global computer networks with the intention to perform virtual labor and have access to sources of technological entertainment available only to members of this global village. Luz María, a *coyotek* who helps workers access cheap hardware plugs, takes Memo to the Tijuana Node Bar, a place where he can get clandestinely connected.[1] Aesthetically, the bar epitomizes the dystopian character of the futuristic world Memo is now a part of: red, green, and blue neon lights pouring over bodies in an otherwise darkened room with walls covered by mirrors; live node girls; a tired worker

getting virtual shots of tequila; and a *cyberfichera* dancing with a client to the hypnotic snare drum beat, accordion loops, and hallucinating trumpet melody of Bostich's "Norteña del sur," which loudly fills the bar.[2] When his node job is complete, Memo reflects on his new cyborg condition: "Finally, I could connect my nervous system to the other system—the global economy." He would soon work as a tele-migrant, operating construction machinery in a high-rise somewhere in the Global North from a virtual sweatshop in a Tijuana shantytown.[3]

It is not surprising that when Alex Rivera, the director of *Sleep Dealer* (2008), imagined a soundtrack for his examination of migrant life in a not-too-distant dystopic future, he borrowed the sounds of Bostich and the Nortec Collective, with their modernist reinvention of tradition and their way of making the often-disdained sounds of working-class music from the north of Mexico (banda and norteña) into symbols of an oddly cosmopolitan hipster coolness.[4] In the 2000s, and not without reason, this music came to epitomize Tijuana, the border between two apparently opposed financial, social, and cultural worlds. In the late 1980s, Néstor García Canclini infamously referred to this region as a "laboratory of postmodernity," before rectifying that and calling it a "laboratory of the social and political disintegration of Mexico."[5] Its sudden international success in the early 2000s also made Nortec into the soundtrack of the city that Antonio Navalón guilelessly and uncritically commemorated with his magniloquent and problematic binational art project *Tijuana, Tercera Nación* in 2005.[6] Indeed, for those who are open to listen in detail, beyond the celebratory rhetoric of naive scholars, politicians, and cultural brokers, the sounds of the Nortec Collective have also come to embody the symbolic and real violence generated by the friction caused by the asymmetries between the so-called developed and developing worlds. The global success of these sounds not only put these asymmetries on the dance floor for everyone to hear but also provided a new point of entry into making sense of the Mexican experience without having to pass through Mexico City, thus subverting the nationalist discourse that represents the US-Mexico border as the margins of the nation-state. Instead, Nortec put Tijuana in the spotlight and relegated Mexico City to the background. In that sense, the sounds of Nortec became an archive for the construction of a postnational memory. Here, the idea of the postnational refers to "a point of view beyond the nation-state as a frame of reference," and a way to engage the experience of those who have to negotiate the contradictions of living in a multi-ideological geographic and cultural matrix on an everyday basis.[7]

As Nadim Khoury suggests, postnational memory refers to the development of new identities and narratives that build on "resources within national identity—suppressed voices and counternarratives—to disclose alternative futures. . . . Postnational memory is a way of thinking about the past in this possible and more just future."[8] Thus, postnational memory implies a way of remembering that evades the epistemic placeholders of nationalism and remains critical of the exclusions generated by its discourse of difference. In describing postnationalist memory, Nigel Young also highlights the need to look into the nationalist archive to "break a wide range of silences" and eventually "transcend a national framing of the past."[9] In other words, postnational memory indicates a reassessment of past narratives that listens to the voices that nationalist histories have kept silent in order to reimagine not only the past but also a future that includes them. Nonetheless, the violence behind these histories of silence and suppression often implies a new dystopic relationship with the narratives and frameworks from the past.

In *Sleep Dealer*, the Nortec Collective's sounds represent the dreams and nightmares about modernity and the collapse of the nationalist fantasy informing Rivera's cinematic premonition. These aspirations and desires speak of a geography where past and present meet, engendering all sorts of imaginatively informed fantasies about the future. Thus, the fantastic utopian and dystopian imaginaries displayed in Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* put in evidence the central shortcomings and delusions of the Mexican projects of modernity and nation building. They reveal a postnational condition in which seemingly desperate individual actions respond to unfulfilled needs, desires, and aspirations; a condition in dialogue with the promise of global mobility and interconnectedness that the political and economic project of the nation-state is unable to deliver even when its materialization has become essential for the everyday survival of these individuals. These are the conditions that give Alex Rivera's dystopian futurist fantasy its eerie sense of reality and imminence. In that sense, *Sleep Dealer* works as an archive of postnational memory that not only stores evidence of the cultural crisis of the Mexican nation-state and uses it to imagine an alternative from the bottom up but also stores documentation of how individuals have already started developing cultural practices and strategies that deal with this crisis and highlights new notions of identity and cosmopolitan—if dystopic—belonging. As an archive, the film speaks of both the imaginary and the real, of what could happen and what has already happened in a country where the desires expressed in national symbols remain while the system

that should give everyday cultural and political valence to those symbols collapses.

The benefits and shortcomings of Memo's new connectivity inform the film's plot thoroughly. One of these problems is that the nodes allow Luz María to access Memo's memories, creatively edit them to give them the patina of stylistic authenticity expected by a global north market hungry for "real stories," and sell them as commodities through an online memory market platform called TruNode. Although this situation is only tangentially touched on in the film in order to dramatize Memo and Luz María's romantic relationship, I want to dwell on it because, as Kristy Ulibarri argues, it speaks of "traces of memory" that act as the building blocks of a "speculative realism [that] parses both the visible and the invisible processes that produce these violent entanglements of the virtual and the real."[10] However, rather than focusing on the slow death of the worker that Ulibarri highlights in her analysis of *Sleep Dealer*, I want to pay attention to the potential of these traces of memory and the testimonies they inspire as what Cristina Rivera Garza calls *noriginales* (nonoriginals). Rivera Garza coined this neologism to talk about how, rather than fetishized loci of authenticity, archival documents are produced through collaborative negotiations that continuously assess, reassess, and rewrite the past affectively in the present to invoke and confirm that very present.[11] For her, the potential of these *noriginales* lies in their questioning of the authority of the archive and the assumed originality of its documents while keeping in mind that the mediating processes that actually make them into documents in the first place are fueled by individual and collective efforts to listen to the silences in the past in order to understand the present in new ways. In other words, as Rivera Garza poetically puts it, it is all about activating "in the present a past that is always about to happen."[12]

Chapters 1 through 3 discuss archival formations that shed light on the development of the Mexican national fantasy in relation to an imaginary past and an anticipated future, the types of knowledges that the reproduction of this fantasy enables, and a series of strategies to either escape the patrimonial gaze embedded in these formations or turn it upside down. These chapters deal with what a postnational revamping of the information stored within these archival formations allows one to know, see, or listen to. In this chapter, I move away from the logic of the institutional archive and the types of rhetorical actions it supports, or the efforts to subvert it, to focus instead on the logics of the individual collector as seen in two very different but oddly similar mid-2010s ar-

chival ventures: Mexican Rarities and *Disco pirata*. Like Rivera in *Sleep Dealer*, I do not intend to estrange a nationalist archive but rather explore the labor and potential of putting together an archive that generates postnational memories and subverts the values and logic of the national archive model from the outset.

Mexican Rarities: An Oddity Among Mexican Sound Archives

On February 13, 2021, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, music collector Arturo Castillo (b. 1963), digital artist Alfredo Martínez (b. 1986), underground musician and visual artist Víctor Garay (b. 1985), and sound artist Juan Pablo Villegas (b. 1986) launched Mexican Rarities via an online event. Presented as an "archive, label, channel for distribution of content, and a platform for underground events," the project's avowed mission is to store, preserve, and recirculate Mexican music that by virtue of its oddity remains hidden "in different layers of the Mexican subsoil."[13] The event was the formal presentation of the project's web page—the internet interface of an analog archive—which was accompanied by the launching of the project's first LP, *Inframundo* (Underworld), by Esteban Aldrete (aka Nicolas), and the reissue of a limited edition of *Cometa 1973/Cromometrofonía No. 1*, a cult LP recorded in the early 1970s by Óscar Vargas Leal and David Espejo, Julián Carrillo's last Sonido 13 disciples. The title of Aldrete's album and the underground character of Vargas Leal and Espejo's LP perfectly highlight Mexican Rarities' task of unearthing little-known music and sound projects that escape the commercial logic of the Mexican music industry and giving them a chance to circulate or recirculate among a community of folks eager to listen to and engage unconventional musical practices.

The virtual launching of Mexican Rarities was the crystallization of an idea born more than twelve years earlier, when Martínez and Villegas, then teenagers, met Castillo and became fascinated by his huge collection of alternative music. Back in the 1980s, Castillo was already well known in the underground Mexico City music scene as someone who, in a pre-internet and pre-NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) world, had access to an unprecedented number of avant-garde musical materials and projects from around the world that were largely unavailable in Mexican music stores and media. At El Chopo, the legendary Mexico City alternative music flea market, where one could find bootlegs of everything from Nueva Trova to Krautrock, Castillo was known as the person to go to for

Rock in Opposition and Wax Trax.[14] He had spent most of his life amassing an impressive collection of international avant-garde and experimental music that had very little to no circulation in Mexican commercial music networks. But he was not interested in simply storing these piles of LPs at home; he wanted to share the music with anyone curious and interested. In the 1980s El Chopo provided the perfect subcultural venue for that; it gave Castillo a space for musical exchange and buying and selling, as well as a community where his erudition was valued and his expertise sought after. In 1989 Castillo's extensive collection and growing reputation as an expert in international avant-garde musics led to an invitation by performance artist Roberto Escobar to collaborate in *La Mecánica del Concepto*, a celebrated radio show devoted to the dissemination of international experimental music for the pioneering Mexico City radio station Rock 101. In a way, this project brought Castillo out of the underground shadows and into the mainstream. In the 1990s he opened the first of several music stores he would manage through the 2010s and ventured into organizing concerts in Mexico for some of the European music projects he was interested in. At the same time, he continued to accumulate a vast collection of LPs, CDs, and cassettes that, by the turn of the twenty-first century, took up most of the space in his Roma neighborhood apartment.

It was at this time that Castillo met Martínez and Villegas. The two youngsters were budding music collectors interested in the type of international experimental music Castillo was a known champion of. Since Castillo's apartment had become an informal point of encounter for many collectors, musicians, and people interested in these musics, it was only a matter of time before Martínez and Villegas found their way to his place. Martínez recalls his first visit to Castillo's apartment: "At the time one did not see much vinyl [in Arturo's place]; the LPs were in boxes in an out-of-sight room. Everything was CDs. It was very impressive. The space was large, but there was no furniture. All you could see were towers and towers and towers and towers of CDs. I talked to him and explained my musical tastes, and he selected six CDs, gave me a beer, and sent me into a listening room. I listened to everything he recommended. After that day, I started going there every single weekend."[15] These open-house weekends attracted well-established artists and young folks alike. While Castillo became a mentor for Martínez and Villegas, the presence of important figures from the Mexico City art scene also allowed them to articulate new artistic and intellectual networks.[16] Meeting Castillo not only encouraged Martínez's

and Villegas's collecting efforts but also provided them with a solid aesthetic, artistic, and historical orientation for their future careers as visual and sound artists.

Although Castillo was known for his interest in circulating European and US avant-garde music, all along he kept collecting Mexican music that he considered the counterpart to the foreign alternative projects he advocated for. This included bands like Nazca, La Banda Elástica, and La Nopalera; blues singer Guillermo Briceño; Indigenous musics; microtonal maverick Julián Carrillo; and electronic music pioneers like Antonio Russek, Roberto Morales, and Vicente Rojo Cama, among many others. Regardless of their initial interest in European and US alternative musics, when Martínez and Villegas approached him, Castillo was adamant about instilling in them an awareness of the sound of these Mexican projects. Villegas remembers:

> Arturo opened the doors to certain materials for me. I was like: "What am I doing?" There was an impressive number of artists, musicians, and projects that were not being valued, researched, or analyzed and that came from [Mexico]. I did make a value judgment and said, "This is amazing! Sonically it is an impressive thing. But people do not know it. I do not know it. Why is this happening?" So, something that became clear to me was that there was a lot of carelessness on the part of institutions, of the artists, of the labels, about generating a memory or about taking responsibility for [making sure people knew] that this is part of our culture, that these discs are not only commodities or that they are inserted in a market but that they are also part of an identity and that in part that music and those sounds make us. They make us who we are and are part of our history.[17]

Villegas acknowledges that meeting Castillo was fundamental for him and Martínez since it sent them into a frenzy to find these strange, largely marginal Mexican musical projects. In the 2000s, under Castillo's mentorship, Martínez and Villegas became avid collectors of alternative experimental Mexican music while pursuing their degrees in visual arts—Martínez at the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado "La Esmeralda" and Villegas at the Centro de Diseño, Cine y Televisión, later pursuing graduate studies at Le Fresnoy Studio National des Arts Contemporains in Tourcoing, France.

One evening at his store, in the early 2010s, Castillo was looking through his collection of music and began asking himself, "It's been thirty years of

advocating for these [foreign] avant-garde musics . . . but I am Mexican. What's up with the Mexican stuff?"[18] This reflection led him to the idea of creating Mexican Rarities as an archive devoted to those initiatives. He mulled over the idea for a couple of years and finally, in 2015, invited Martínez, who had already stockpiled his own substantial collection of CDs and vinyl of experimental Mexican music, to work together with him on developing the archive. Castillo explains that the original idea was "to rescue things [from oblivion]. To rescue recordings of artists and bands who were almost unknown or whose existence went by largely unnoticed. . . . The idea was to reissue a few unknown old titles and then to issue new stuff."[19] Two years later, Castillo and Martínez presented the project to the community of vinyl collectors at the 2017 Expo Vinylo Oaxaca (EVO). This presentation laid out the mission of Mexican Rarities as a project devoted to the preservation and organization of materials from Mexican subcultural projects. A day after the presentation, Castillo and Martínez, advertised as Los Eclipses, also presented a DJ set of Latin, folk, and psychedelic rock based on materials from the archive. Although this incarnation of Mexican Rarities still looked quite different from its final configuration, as formalized two years later, the Oaxaca performance of Los Eclipses made it evident that bringing the archive to life through the artistic and performatic reactivation of its documents was already one of the most important missions of the project.

Between 2017 and 2021, Mexican Rarities was consolidated with the incorporation of Garay in 2020 and Villegas in 2021. When it was finally launched on February 13, 2021, its legal status as a Sociedad de Acciones Simplificadas (SAS) had been established, and the organization chart and division of labor were in place: Castillo contributed his expertise on the materials of the collection as well as his knowledge of exchange networks; Martínez designed, programmed, and maintained the project's internet page; Villegas was in charge of the reactivation of the archive via the coordination of events and parties; and Garay was the video editor and the person in charge of managing the project's connection to artists.[20] Later, they were able to hire Daniel Kobelkowsky to work on transferring the digitized information and data to the website. By this time, the iconography of the website—especially the finalized version of the project's symbol, a Quetzalcoatl circling around an LP (which came out of a dream Martínez had) rather than around a treble clef as in the earlier version presented at the EVO—was well established. Its layout and the multiple identity of Mexican Rarities as an archive, label, store, and regulator of the socialization of the

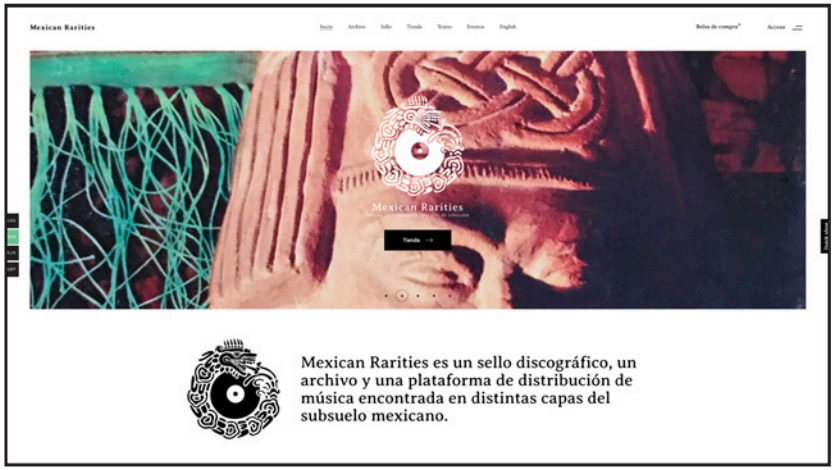

FIGURE 5.1. Home page of the Mexican Rarities website, https://mexicanrarities.com. Screenshot, November 6, 2024.

archive's holdings through the organization of various events to guarantee their recirculation were in place (figure 5.1).

Although its main window to the world is its website, Mexican Rarities is actually not a virtual or electronic archive. It is an archive of analog documents and recordings whose content was put together by combining the personal LP, CD, and cassette collections of Castillo, Martínez, and Villegas. In fact, the intention was never for the website to be an archive but rather for it to work as a partial window into the actual archival repository and its analog holdings, with the idea that interested folks could get in touch with members of the project if they wanted to access any particular item, whether for further research, for acquisition purposes, or for developing other types of creative projects.

Mexican Rarities as an Archival Project

As an archive, Mexican Rarities stores more than twenty thousand items. However, by the beginning of 2024, only about one thousand had been documented and digitized, and only a small portion of those digital documents had been uploaded to the website. Castillo and Martínez decided that the more practical and organized way to go about documenting these materials was to organize them, digitize them, and upload them according to series or collections. The process started with the digitalization of

the vinyl records related to Julián Carrillo (which included the series of records he self-produced in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as other materials related to him, his students, or his Sonido 13 project). After that, they incorporated the LPs of Ángel Cosmos's *Colección Hispano-Mexicana de Música Contemporánea* (Hispanic American collection of contemporary Mexican music); *Testimonio Musical de México* (Musical testimony of Mexico), by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), a long-standing collection that bears witness to the country's Indigenous and ethnic diversity; the Instituto Nacional Indigenista series documenting its ethnographic and audiovisual archive; a series of recordings connected to the Grupo Tribu's seminal ethnomusicological work in the 1970s; the *Voz Viva* (Live voice) series of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), which features authors reading from their own works; the series of *Encuentros de Música Tradicional Indígena* (Encounters of traditional Indigenous music) from the Fondo Nacional para Actividades Sociales (FONAPAS); and the Mexican recordings from the Smithsonian Folkways series; as well as a few other collections of independent labels. Mexican Rarities features these collections in agreement with the institutions or individuals who first produced them.

According to Martínez, the process of documentation implies uploading all the information of every disc, including pictures of the cover and back cover, pictures of the A and B sides of the actual record, transcriptions of the booklets and credits, transcriptions of the track lists, and transcriptions of the notes. Besides this information, every item's entry on the website also includes links to other websites that may contain information about those items, information about the highest and average price paid for that particular record, information about and links to the original publishing label, and links to similar musical materials. Martínez acknowledges that the Mexican Rarities internet database is inspired by the Discogs free marketplace model, which encourages the preservation of information as well as the circulation of sonic materials.[21] However, since the Mexican Rarities staff is well aware of possible copyright infringement issues, the website very rarely provides actual sound files of the music on these records. However, if existing recordings of a particular item are available on the internet, the database entry would contain information about them and even links to them.[22] Finally, since the archive's internet interface is meant to be bilingual, once all the information has been gathered and digitized, it is translated into English. Nevertheless, the materials are uploaded only once an entire series has been completely digitized, formalized, and systematized.

It is clear that Mexican Rarities is an archive of established series and collections that have received little or no commercial distribution or that have slipped through the cracks of the Mexican music market. As such, its holdings are not original or unique documents that may not exist anywhere else. Instead, they are the type of *noriginales* that Rivera Garza refers to. They are significant and meaningful not for their presumed originality but rather because of the interpersonal dynamics and the collective meaning they generate in the present. As Rivera Garza would put it, whether these documents are originals or not is not important; what is crucial is that they are appropriated and revamped "locally and in an everyday reality to 'generate present,' that is precisely their meaning."[23] Thus, the value of their rareness is not connected to their exceptionality as documents as is the case for materials in conventional archives. Instead, their value refers to how their oddness is reevaluated in the present precisely because it challenges the placeholders of traditional narratives where these documents are either marginalized or rendered invisible, forcing us to reassess the very ideological framework that gives meaning to those narratives in the first place. In that sense, Mexican Rarities breaks away from the logic of traditional archives by refusing to adhere to the idea of the repository as a site of memory and authority. Instead, it follows the logic of the collector, highlighting the circulation of materials and the construction of memory as a collective endeavor. This is precisely the reason the other identities of Mexican Rarities—as a store, label, and platform for regulating the recirculation of its holdings—are fundamental in understanding the archive's promise of a postnational memory.

Mexican Rarities as a Store, Label, and Platform

If the logic of the collector is already in evidence in Mexican Rarities' archiving/archival labor, it is in its work as a label, store, and regulating platform that this logic and its postnational potential become more apparent. The idea of linking the archive to a label and a store was an answer to Castillo and Martínez's long-standing collecting endeavor, which one could trace back to Castillo's work at El Chopo in the 1980s and his desire to circulate certain materials among a small elite of interested audiophiles regardless of their purchasing power. Forty years later, the economic situation, technological access, availability of materials and information, and circulation networks at Castillo's, Martínez's, Villegas's, and Garay's disposal are all very different. However, the desire to share music is still what

motivates their labor in Mexican Rarities. Thus, following on Castillo's experience with his music stores as a central aspect in his collecting efforts, the idea of pairing the archive to a system that would facilitate the circulation of some of its materials started with the very conceptualization of the archive. Moreover, creating a label and a store, and imagining a system to manage the public performatic recirculation of the archival materials via DJ sets and through the organization of talks and workshops, was at once a way to reactivate the documents in the archive (in a manner that reverberates with the goals of the Fonoteca Nacional and some of its projects, although following different regulation strategies), a way to educate and inform people about these materials, and a pragmatic way to help finance the project. These workshops and DJ set events allow the members of the Mexican Rarities team to sonically feature the archive's materials for an interested audience, while the label gives the project the possibility of producing objects that would eventually be sold at their internet store.

This financial model is not without shortcomings. One of them is precisely that the advent of the internet has changed the way most audiophiles relate to music and the material objects used to store it. Evidently, the internet is an instrument that facilitates the circulation of materials that used to be almost impossible to access for folks who were not part of international networks of people who knew about these underground projects and had access to their recordings. However, the massive availability of musical materials in digital formats has also helped shape a new generation of listeners who are content with streaming or owning digital versions of their favorite music and are not interested in buying LPs or CDs. This would seem to be an offer-demand trend working against the Mexican Rarities model. Nevertheless, Castillo states, "Throughout time I have generated an interest in collecting Mexican things. . . . Regardless of the digital boom, at least in Mexico there is an interest in collecting. . . . Fortunately, there is a worldwide vinyl boom [that helps]; so, I do see that young people in Mexico want to learn and have more information. Even though the younger generations are not used to handling [these types of formats], there is a growing interest."[24] As Castillo describes, Mexican Rarities has been able to circumvent the apparent lack of a market for their product resulting from the development of streaming systems and other internet servers by appealing to the collector's logic and the way it generates a type of aura for their product, a cultural capital that is appealing to a very particular community of connoisseurs. Although this is not a strategy that aims at engaging a large mainstream market, its articulation of the desires of a small aural

elite—undoubtedly a segment of the Aural City, as I explain below—has been enough for the project to be successfully self-sufficient.

Martínez explains the business model and the funding of Mexican Rarities as follows:

> At the beginning, Mexican Rarities was financially funded by me personally. There is no governmental or private support. At some point we looked into that, but the reality is that institutions in Mexico are very much neglected; [they] have very little support. In a way, doing it with our own means was an anarchivist way of generating this archive. So, early on, I personally paid for the cost of the server, the platform, and the person who helps us. But now the project has started crawling by itself thanks to the label and the different [LPs] we have released. . . . [Publishing] the work of bands that have a large underground following has helped maintain the economy of the label. . . . The idea is to [alternate the] release of an experimental art LP of which we only make a few difficult-to-sell copies, and then an underground LP with a larger fanbase that is easier to sell, interspersing between them reissues [of historical material].[25]

It is not coincidental that, invoking Jacques Derrida, Martínez refers to their DIY strategy as an anarchivist project since avoiding state support and achieving financial independence is precisely a first step toward emancipation from "the archon in the archive," a first step toward overcoming the archive's embedded sense of authority.[26] This move affords Mexican Rarities a freedom of action and epistemological agency that is often missing in the type of top-down hierarchies that institutional archives validate. Escaping the logic of validation that characterizes institutional archives also provides a foundation for the reimagination of the archive's authority as a dialogic enterprise at the nexus of archiving labor, circulating labor, retrieving labor, and consumption. This plan of action has allowed Mexican Rarities as a label to strategically combine its mission to reissue old and unavailable recording productions and to issue recordings by new marginal and alternative experimental musicians while staying true to its original creed of making *lo inaudito* heard. The desires informing these types of labor in relation to the musics they engage are also fundamental in this process of collective archival reevaluation.

Castillo, Martínez, and Villegas agree that one of the foundational projects for Mexican Rarities was the documentation of Julián Carrillo's work. Martínez confesses that his passion to collect music was triggered by his

obsession with "finding hard copies of Sonido 13 records, the discs produced by Sonido 13 as well as other labels related to Julián Carrillo."[27] Villegas further explains this fascination with Carrillo: "When I discovered the immensity of Carrillo's universe, it just overwhelmed me. I became passionate about his personal story and everything related to the manufacture of his [microtonal] instruments . . . because I myself make machines . . . so, all his work about developing and designing the instruments, the musical notation, the philosophy behind it, the theory; it was very exciting for me."[28] Under the spell of Carrillo and his Sonido 13's aura, which has enchanted many citizens of the Mexican Aural City, the team focused the initial efforts of Mexican Rarities on making accessible the collection of recordings produced by Carrillo in Paris between 1960 and 1963, and on reissuing the even more mystic *Cometa 1973/Cromometrofonía No. 1*, a real rare cult item among collectors of alternative experimental music.[29] Castillo and Villegas had decided to reissue this LP even before the initial presentation of the Mexican Rarities project at the 2017 EVO. Castillo says, "I discovered this disc many years ago, and I just fell in love with it. . . . I heard the recording and found it fascinating."[30] Villegas further explains, "It was very sad for us that [David and Óscar] were lost to memory, that there was no recognition [of their work], that their [microtonal] harps were in the state they were, that [Óscar's] cabin and the scores were all decaying. That's when I said, 'My God! If the Fonoteca is not doing it, if the art spaces are not doing it . . . What's up? Someone has to do it. We have to do something!' So, Arturo told me, 'Let's the two of us do it if we can.' And that's how it happened."[31] The testimonies of the Mexican Rarities team speak of a believer's crusade informing the early labor toward the formal establishment of the archive. This type of work responds to their own fascination with a very particular musical world, an *inaudito* world that was both astonishing and unheard, as well as a response to what they felt were the shortcomings of state institutions such as the Fonoteca Nacional. Documenting Carrillo's work and reissuing *Cometa 1973/Cromometrofonía No. 1* not only exposes the logic of the collector behind Mexican Rarities but also reveals the face and labor of a subset of the Mexican Aural City, one that, as mentioned earlier, I had identified when attending Sonido 13 concerts in Mexico City during the fieldwork that informed the writing of my book about Julián Carrillo. Indeed, the labor and individual profiles of the members of the Mexican Rarities team could be taken as perfect descriptions of what the Aural City may be and do in reaction to what they perceive as the inaction of national institutions and in a move to separate

themselves from these institutions' patrimonial mission and the excluding nature of their nationalist outlook.

Mexican Rarities, Sediments, and *Noriginales*

Mexican Rarities announces itself as an archive "of music found in different layers of the Mexican subsoil" (see figure 5.1). There are at least three interpretations of this language.[32] On the one hand, it refers to the fact that the project's mission is to unearth musics that are literally unheard due to having been lost or misplaced in the catacombs of Mexican memory. It speaks of the underground character of the records and musical projects that the Mexican Rarities curatorial team is interested in. And, finally, it also refers to the massive character of the Mexican Rarities physical archive as well as the piles of vinyl they had to go through in flea markets and record stores in the hopes of finding a unique musical gem. Villegas elaborates on this practice in great detail:

> We talked about that a lot. To me, it is very beautiful to think about what is beneath the surface of the ground. For example, everything about tubers, potatoes and everything that grows underground, which in the end is what nourishes society in times of crisis. . . . When above the ground everything is desolate, there is still life to be found underground. They are the sources that can suddenly bring back energy and vitality to a society that is in decadence. And on the other hand, it is also about the idea of strata. There are these superheavy layers of concrete, which are these gigantic [transnational] labels that generate stunning quantities of petroleum; they distribute it everywhere and literally generate a crust of information that often crushes these local micro-manifestations. So, it also has to do with that; there is a homogenization that forms a thick stratum that seems to be all there is, but below that there are other realities, other movements, other fluxes. . . . And we also thought about it in relation to the piles of materials in the archive, the physical part of the archive that also accumulates in strata. Often when you look at the archive, you do not see these layers because the LPs are organized horizontally. But if you take a pile of discs and spread them around, you generate a series of layers that are like rocks sedimented on top of each other. They become literal strata of petroleum. You see? The stuff that materializes this memory comes from the underground . . . and we store information in it.[33]

Villegas's eloquent and poetic description of what the idea of the underground means for the Mexican Rarities curatorial team begs to be read through the lens of Cristina Rivera Garza's notion of *escrituras geológicas* (geological writings). For her, an *escritura geológica* is a strategy to dig out sediments that "reveal not only the persistence of the past, its agglomeration in futures that begin with us right now, but also the arduous, and often joyful, process of research . . . as a form of imagination and care."[34] Indeed, Villegas's description of the piles of LPs in the archive reverberates with Martínez's memory of the "towers and towers and towers and towers of CDs" in Castillo's apartment (figure 5.2). These visualizations are an invitation to reimagine the concept of "digging in the crates"—the notoriously time-consuming practice of searching for the right music break to sample that defined classic hip-hop—in the context of looking for that underground music gem that will allow us to reimagine pasts and futures that "begin with us today."[35]

The premises of Mexican Rarities' promise of a postnational memory are evident in the project and labor leading to the documentation of the Carrillo collection and the reissuing of *Cometa 1973/Cromometrofonía No. 1*. Postnational memory in this case refers to a movement away from the patrimonial logic of institutional archives to focus on *noriginales* that acquire meaning in the collector's logic of circulation. It also speaks about Khoury's idea of postnational memory in terms of the desedimentation of voices that the nationalist archive rendered silent or kept hidden. If the nationalist rhetoric is currently empty and its archive unproductive, these forgotten underground practices are the nourishment needed for us to engage a past that is "always about to happen" as we imagine a new anticipated future.[36]

On the other hand, the premises of that postnational promise appear to be more ambiguous in the efforts to document the INAH collection, the second curatorial project of Mexican Rarities. How does a postnational project engage a collection whose very inception was the result of a nationalist project that sought to document the Indigenous sounds of the nation-state by making them into patrimony? A point of entry into answering this question is a text also found on the Mexican Rarities website; its title is "¿De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de México?" (What do we speak about when we speak about Mexico?).[37] Written by Rolando Hernández, a former collaborator of Mexican Rarities, the piece sheds light on how the project's understanding of this collection may differ from the ways in which the INAH and its sound archive, the Fonoteca del

FIGURE 5.2. Partial views of the Mexican Rarities physical archive at the apartment of Arturo Castillo, Mexico City. Photos courtesy of Arturo Castillo.

INAH, have ascribed meaning to this set in the loci of production and storage. Hernández's argument is that there is a paradox in the rhetoric that informs nationalist institutions and their relationship to Indigenous cultures in Mexico. While, on the one hand, this rhetoric celebrates these musics and their communities in order to validate its own claims to national authenticity through their maintained autochthonous purity, on the other, the homogenizing nature of the nationalistic rhetoric actually makes these communities into patrimonial icons whose representation features them largely as essentialized cultures frozen in the past. As Hernández succinctly explains, the paradox lies in the fact that in this rhetoric

> the idea of the Mexican is a straitjacket for the multiplicity of cosmogonies and cultural manifestations of the [country's] sonosphere, which, paradoxically, have been taken over by the national project without even granting them due recognition. . . . This premise leads us to paradoxical situations where the people who exercise violence and take on racist and classist stances toward people from towns in resistance [Indigenous populations] are the same ones whose chest swells with pride when talking about the wonders of their last trip to Oaxaca, the importance of the preservation of traditions, and how many of them should remain intact.[38]

In her research about the invention of the category of the Indigenous in Mexico as part of larger processes of nation building during the first half of the twentieth century, Marina Alonso Bolaños articulates these concerns. There, in relation to the INAH series, she explains that regardless of the fact that the collection "clarifies that Indigenous music features a multiplicity of styles, purposes, and historical traditions, the notions of integration of pre-Hispanic and European elements, syncretism and sacredness, the importance of the collective over the individual and other 'markers of Indianness' always appear as premises to present the pieces contained in the phonograms."[39] Alonso Bolaños recognizes the importance of this collection in generating interest in Indigenous communities that have been marginalized throughout the history of the country. Nevertheless, she is also quick to point out that the patrimonial character of the collection—a natural response to the homogenizing nationalist policies of the modernizing Mexican state—idealizes Indigenous communities and individuals into imaginary representations that conceal the fact that in reality they remain marginalized and often denigrated. Furthermore, this patrimonial enunciation is successful because it rests on the reproduction of deeply embedded stereotypes that have rendered Indigenous cultures as relics of the premodern world. Within this episteme of hungry listening, in a move that ironically resembles the motivation behind the gathering efforts of Adolf Bastian and the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, the individual items in the INAH collection arrogantly stand as witnesses of an imaginary pure tradition that must be protected before the advancement of modern national civilization inevitably corrupts it.

In its treatment of the INAH collection as *noriginales*, Mexican Rarities transcends the patrimonial model privileged by institutional archives. They evade the reification that characterizes the INAH collection because

their interest in documenting this collection does not emanate from its imagined aura of authenticity or a desire to identify any type of cultural roots. Instead, their interest lies in the recognition of Indigenous diversity per se, which the very existence of the collection puts in evidence regardless of the essentializing and homogenizing national project that informed its birth. In a sense, this move takes advantage of identifying the seed of the archive's ideological self-decimation within the archive itself. This aspect of the Mexican Rarities project evokes Young's understanding of postnational promise as a reassessment of past narratives that listens for *lo inaudito* in the archival documents themselves in order to "transcend a national framing of the past."[40] In sum, the postnational promise of Mexican Rarities stands on its challenge to the patrimonial archival model, a challenge that takes *noriginales* and their circulation and activation beyond the space of the archive(s), as its emancipatory reagent. In doing that, the curatorial team of Mexican Rarities comes across as a group of informed and passionate dilettantes whose important labor and cultural capital signal the Mexican Aural City and its ties to a number of alternative musical projects.

Disco pirata as Action Piece, Performance Intervention, and Kitsch Listening

Polifonía ambulante (Ambulant polyphony), an exhibit of four sound installations by French sound artist Félix Blume (b. 1984), opened at Mexico City's Fonoteca Nacional on June 9, 2016. The event was publicized as an homage to Mexico City's *cantos* and *pregones* (street vendors' chants and cries). Indeed, the four works featured in the exhibit, *Coro informal* (Informal choir), *Coro polifónico* (Polyphonic choir), *Los gritos de México* (The cries of Mexico), and *Disco pirata* (Pirate disc), are based on Blume's own samples of cries by Mexico City street vendors, which he identified as unique sonic features of the city's soundscape. Inspired by Clément Janequin's *Les cris de Paris* (The cries of Paris, 1530), a four-part polyphonic chanson based on the cries of vendors in sixteenth-century Parisian markets, the first three sound installations in Blume's exhibit offer a musical way of listening to these Mexico City urban cries.[41] *Coro informal* is a sound installation by Blume and Daniel Godínez Nivón that features ten short street vendor chants in ten individual wooden boxes.[42] Invoking the title of Janequin's chanson, *Los gritos de México* is a twenty-nine-minute-long soundscape composed by Blume using samples of everyday sounds from

Mexico City.[43] *Coro polifónico* is a video-contrafact, a video montage of four singers singing Janequin's chanson in which the original lyrics are replaced by the words of Mexico City street vendor cries.[44] The fourth work in the program, *Disco pirata*, is a selection of one hundred sounds from the city that differs in presentation from the previous works but still argues for a somehow musical approach to the listening of these sounds.[45] In this case, the musical point of entry is the bootlegged CDs sold informally in the city's subway system. I am particularly interested in *Disco pirata* given its transformation from a sound installation and performance art piece into an open-access archive that has frequently been used and referred to by the Mexican Aural City, being particularly popular among sound designers in the local film industry. The fact that *Disco pirata* has become a source of sounds for this group of professionals when trying to sonically re-create Mexico City makes it into an excuse for a discussion about authenticity, representation, and the uses of the archive that problematize the identity claims at the core of nationalist rhetoric.

Trained as a sound engineer, Blume began his career as a technician recording sounds for films and documentaries. He traveled to Mexico City for the first time in 2009 to collaborate on a project by Belgian video artist Francis Alÿs (b. 1959). One of the first things that immediately captivated Blume about Mexico City was the abundance of street vendor sounds. He explains, "I realized that the cries and voices of Mexico City give it a strong sense of sonic identity that other Western cities have lost. I hear those voices, and for me, they are like a polyphonic choir that is part of the city's being."[46] He began recording and storing these sounds in order to document their originality and distinctiveness. In 2010 Blume decided to start sharing his recorded sounds in Freesound, a collaborative database of Creative Commons licensed sounds that allows for the free sharing of this sonic material and its eventual use to creatively build on them.[47] Among the first sound files he shared in this platform, along with sounds from Argentina, Ukraine, Mali, Italy, and France, were the sounds he recorded during his first trip to Mexico.

Although Blume originally began uploading sound files to Freesound with the intention of freely sharing them with anyone interested in using or listening to them, he eventually realized that mere availability was insufficient. To fully convey his sound experience, he needed to use these sounds to express his feelings about the places where he recorded them. This led him to start working more creatively with his sound files and begin composing sound pieces. In 2012 he used the sounds he had recorded for

Aurélien Lévêque's film *El puesto* (2010), about a man living alone in Patagonia, to compose his first sound piece, *Terre de feu: Les moutons du bout du monde* (Land of fire: The sheep from the end of the world). After composing sound pieces about the Fula people from Mali and the Venezuelan grasslands, in 2014 Blume composed *Los gritos de México* using the Mexico City urban sounds that had captivated him during his first visit to the city five years earlier. Part of the reason he composed this piece was that he was back there, living in Mexico City, and wanted to convey a listening experience of the city in which noise can morph into sound that can be aesthetically pleasing. For him, the idea was to make these quotidian sounds available for *chilangos* (people from Mexico City) to pay attention to and to show them a way of listening that bypasses their biased belief that these are just noises they have to endure. Furthermore, as Blume stated in the program notes to the piece, this soundscape is meant to celebrate "all of [Mexico City's] shouts, as they take part in the sound memory of a time that will be over sooner or later."[48] The piece was featured at art festivals in Argentina, Austria, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Taiwan, the United States, and Uruguay. It received an honorable mention at the 2014 Bienal Internacional de Radio de México and won the Pierre Schaeffer Award at the 2015 Phonurgia Nova Festival in France. On its presentation at the 2015 Loop Festival in Barcelona, Spanish political scientist Ariadna Rissola wrote:

> The story told by the artist invites us to make two reflections. First, the homogenization of cities so often denounced by contemporary artists is also taking place in a city as unique, as genuine, as Mexico City, but not only due to the knock-on effect of globalization, but as a result of policies intended to make the elements of popular culture that are less pleasant for the consumer society disappear. Second, given that these customs tend to disappear, Félix Blume's work ends up exercising a recording function (between documentary and ethnography) that over time can become a historical archive or sound memory of a time destined to disappear.[49]

The growing interest in soundscapes, ecoacoustics, and the understanding of sound as patrimony among intellectual elites in the United States, Europe, and Latin America paved the way for the positive reception of *Los gritos de México*. Thus, Blume's project provides a semipatrimonial sonic gaze that seeks to document sound practices that may disappear due to the government of Mexico City's attempt to regulate street vendors and

the city's informal economy. However, unlike institutional patrimonial projects like the Fonoteca's soundscapes, which focus on establishing an essentialized connection between sound and place in terms of nature and tradition, the semipatrimonial gaze in Blume's project focuses on sounds that are the result of more recent urban practices, with less permanent or natural attachments to place. The international success of this piece helped launch Blume's career as a sound artist and played a significant role in the organization of the 2016 exhibit *Polifonía ambulante*, a further reinterpretation of Blume's sound recordings of Mexico City's everyday life and the project that gave birth to *Disco pirata*.

Blume created *Disco pirata* as an action piece that incorporates the sounds of Mexico City he had been fascinated with into the logic of circulation that characterizes the city's informal pirate music economy. He did it by selecting one hundred of his Mexico City sound files, organizing them into five categories (cries associated with specific trades, sounds of specific public events, sounds of public activities, sounds associated with specific places, and sounds heard on public transportation), and producing a CD of them. Like bootlegs sold in the subway or the streets in downtown Mexico City, Blume's *Disco pirata* was packaged in individual poly plastic CD sleeves including a cheap paper jacket that imitated the kitschy designs that characterize pirate CDs (figure 5.3).[50] Diego Aguirre Fernández, a graphic artist with whom Blume had collaborated for a couple of years, was in charge of designing the jackets. He recalls that Blume and he analyzed several pirate CD jackets and concluded that the designs for these discs are collages characterized by an aesthetic of excess; "they try to tell you as much as they can. If there are one hundred musicians, they try to include the silhouette of one hundred musicians." Aguirre Fernández says that he tried to mimic that style: "We did the title in 3D, with the Zócalo in the background, some mariachis, the gas tanks, a bike selling tamales, the wrestlers, etc. We also noticed that every pirate CD has the signature of a producing company, so Félix and I came up with Cocodrilo Producciones. . . . We also replicated this comical attitude when they say that their pirate CDs are 100% original."[51] To capture as closely as possible the original pirate aesthetic in the jacket materials, Blume had them manufactured in Tepito, the working-class Mexico City neighborhood where many of these pirate products are made, by a printer in the bootlegging business. Thus, the paper and the print quality met the standards in this economy. In other words, as the seal of originality on the jacket claims, Blume's *Disco pirata* is truly an original pirate copy.

FIGURE 5.3. Front and back covers of Félix Blume's CD *Disco pirata* (2016). Design by Diego Aguirre Fernández. Courtesy of Diego Aguirre Fernández.

Once the CDs were ready, Blume had to obtain permission from the leaders of the bootleg mafia to be able to sell them in the subway without upsetting them or creating any friction with other vendors. The final step was to embody the performance style of Mexico City subway vendors and try to sell the CDs in the train cars. Greek theater scholar Despina Panagiotopoulou, who collaborated with Blume in documenting the performance side of the project, states that people in the subway had "a question in their eyes: 'What are these people doing?' Because we [looked] more white [*sic*], and they could understand that we were not Mexican. . . . First, we would look if there was someone selling their CDs. If there was somebody, we would go to the next wagon [train car]. Then [Félix would] give the CDs to people. Some people gave [him] money. Some people were laughing; they were a little bit confused. Some people were very interested. I did not see any indifference."[52] Indeed, Panagiotopoulou's video of the performance shows Blume making his way through subway cars and yelling in a conspicuous attempt to emulate the *chilango* accent and the singing style of street vendors: "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On this occasion I bring to you, for sale, the album of the sounds of Mexico City. It includes more than one hundred sounds in MP3 format. It's more than three hours long with all the sounds of Mexico City. It includes the one about the Oaxacan tamales, the one about the old iron to sell. None of the good ones are missing. It costs ten pesos; you pay ten pesos." Among the

many reactions, one can see a young couple amusingly discussing the track list before paying for the CD as well as an older lady gleefully watching as Blume lists the qualities of the album to two youngsters who, laughing, tell him that they do not want to buy it.[53] Indeed, the overall impression is that of a sense of silly complicity. Most subway users recognize the absurdity of the situation—a foreign white man, wearing a nice polo-like shirt, who tries to sound like a local vendor and attempts to sell them pirate CDs featuring the sounds they hear every day of their lives—but amusingly choose to play along.

Blume's explanation of the performance piece avoids mentioning this reaction and distances him from the incongruity of the situation. Instead, he states that this action was meant "to give back to the streets what I had recorded on the streets."[54] Central to Blume's apology for the recording endeavor is his belief that the city sounds he records do not belong to him; "they belong to the city, to the vendor, to the vendor's bell, to the tree planted in the Madrid Park, which sounds when the wind blows . . . or they belong to the wind."[55] Thus, *Disco pirata* plays with the idea that Blume, like the producers and sellers of pirate CDs in Mexico City, is also circulating something that does not belong to him. However, unlike the pirate street vendors, Blume considers himself "a sort of bond between sounds and listeners."[56] In the end, Blume was not actually interested in making a profit from selling the CDs. He knew he would sell only a handful of copies. The real motivation for this symbolic action was the opportunity to temporarily access the distribution channels of this informal economy in order to give regular *chilangos* a chance to encounter their city soundscapes in an unexpected and estranged manner, and an opportunity to listen to them anew, thus erasing the boundary between sound and noise and promoting a type of listening that is aware of the connection between sound and local identity. As the back jacket states, the CD offers "exclusive MP3 pirate distribution [and a] different [way of] listening of your city" (see figure 5.3). Certainly, since the performance was limited to a very small pool of people, it worked only as a symbolic action. The real moment for *chilangos* to relisten to these sounds happened at the Fonoteca exhibit since the event was designed precisely to promote this type of listening along the lines of the institution's mission. Echoing Blume's justification of his pieces, critic Ana Cecilia Medina wrote that "stripped of their context, these calls awaken the individual and collective memory of the city. The visitors to the [Fonoteca's] garden listen and move to the imaginary and concrete spaces that are familiar. 'Polifonía Ambulante' is a reading of the city, to rediscover it by listening."[57]

There is a certain kitsch and simulacrum-like quality to Blume's project and its call to relisten to the city sounds that can be inferred from paying attention to specific moments in the production of *Disco pirata*. They are more evident in the sense of excess that characterizes the stylistic materiality of the CD as well as Blume's interactions with his subway clientele. From Aguirre Fernández's design of the CD jacket as a faithful emulation of original pirate iconography to Blume's imitation of pirate vendors' calls and their performance style, there is a patent excess between originality and representation that generates a productive cultural tension. The sense of artificial excess that characterizes the project is clear in Aguirre Fernández's playful approach to jacket design, which mischievously states, "We are the second-best brand in piracy. Here we do make badass records" (see figure 5.3); in Blume's imitation of the street vendors' calls and accent; and in their amused reception by subway passengers. There is always something a bit off in these examples, and that mismatch confers on the project a surplus that manifests in amusement and laughter. In a way, the surplus between emulation in the loci of production and performance and the project's mission to trigger a new type of semipatrimonial listening leads to a rather kitschy reevaluation of these sounds. In fact, Blume's proposed reassessment of everyday Mexico City sounds resonates with the kitsch approach to the city's popular visual culture that editorial projects like Cristina Faesler Bremer's *ABCDF* (2001) and Juan Carlos Mena's *Sensacional de diseño mexicano* (2001) made so trendy among the early twenty-first-century Mexican Lettered and Aural Cities. This kitsch attitude framed the successful reception of musical projects like the Nortec Collective or Nopal Beat.[58] If kitsch speaks of a sensibility that embraces artificiality as a type of parodic catharsis, one could read Blume's project as third-degree kitsch, as proposed by Celeste Olalquiaga, as a type of empowerment that comes from an outside appropriation of a tradition in an attempt to adapt it to new aural and expressive needs.[59]

Disco pirata as Open-Access Archive

After its initial intervention in Mexico City's informal economy, *Disco pirata* found its natural niche within the walls of the Aural City as the action piece that welcomed visitors to the Fonoteca Nacional for the *Polifonía ambulante* exhibit, and later in New York's Mexican Cultural Institute, where the piece was featured in 2018 as part of *Sonic Postcards from Mexico City*.

The cultural circuit of these sounds came full circle when Blume made the CD available free for download on his personal website and on Freesound. That move eventually made *Disco pirata* into an archive itself, a cult object that began to circulate widely since its Creative Commons license allowed people to use its sounds for free. Soon, the archive and its files became very popular among sound designers in the Mexican film industry. Sound designer Daniel Rojo states that one of the reasons why *Disco pirata* turned into a recurring resource in his field is that although it contains many of Mexico City's contemporary sonic clichés—such as the *fierro viejo pregón*, a recorded call for scrap metal that, due to its free licensing, has become a ubiquitous audio meme in the city since it was first recorded on cassette in 2005—it also provides users easy access to unique sound files.[60] In speaking about his own work as sound designer, Rojo shares that he has used selected files from Blume's archive "to sonically illustrate the city in the most subtle but convincing way."[61] Sound designer César González Cortés suggests that although it is always difficult to identify sounds from specific sound archives once the final mix of a movie is ready, using sounds that belong to the places being represented makes a film more credible and realistic. He argues that "the reason why *Disco pirata* has been so successful [among sound designers] is that it includes sounds that are endemic to Mexico City. Since there are so many movies about Mexico City, one always needs its typical sounds, and Félix [Blume] is one of the persons who has spent more time recording them."[62]

In speaking about the importance of sound in developing a sense of authenticity in film, sound recordist Isabel Muñoz Cota argues that "truth is in the sound. . . . For me it is unthinkable to try to tell a story without [using sound] as a narrative tool. You are telling a story with sound. You are not just illustrating something. You are going to generate a feeling [and other] things, through whatever the spectator hears."[63] On first reading these statements, one gets a sense that Muñoz Cota, Rojo, and González Cortés all emphasize the sound itself as a source of authenticity: "Truth is in the sound," says Muñoz Cota, while González Cortés and Rojo acknowledge the uniqueness of Blume's sounds and the fact that they are "endemic" to Mexico City. Although there is a sense of veracity associated with the sounds themselves, all of them are quick to point out that it is the representation created with those sounds that needs to be "convincing" if it is to "generate feelings" in the process of listening. In that sense, they all acknowledge that the listening experience is the site where that sense of authenticity arises and makes a film's diegetic sounds veritable.

Disco pirata makes evident that the information stored in the archive is a mediation of reality just as much as the sound environments created with these sounds are also assembled representations of reality. In both cases, there is a symbolic system in place that allows listeners to develop affective responses to the sounds and to the uses of those sounds. On the one hand, *Disco pirata* features the aurality of a French artist who was captivated with the sounds of Mexico City he heard while living in the city's downtown. Blume brought to his encounter with these sounds the perspective of an outsider who was able to disentangle them from the negative connotations as annoying noise they may have for local *chilangos* precisely because he was a foreigner. His aurality was informed by the patrimonialist ethos of an outsider for whom these sounds were an intrinsic aspect of an aesthetic experience of the urban space. However, while trying to safeguard these sounds for future generations, he also made them into objects of aesthetic contemplation. As such, the material result of Blume's aurality, the CD with the preserved schizophonic sounds, attained the status of kitsch since severing these sounds from their specific cultural and geographic contexts generates a surplus of affective value that may translate into moments of comical absurdity. In the case of a film's sound design, the tacit agreement between filmmaker and audience is about "selling and buying" an illusion that generates a veritable impression of reality. As an open-access archive, *Disco pirata* allows for a creative recovery of the sound objects that brings them back from the realm of kitsch into the realm of simulacrum—representation perceived as reality. Thus, throughout the *Disco pirata* process, listening—more than sound or the sound object per se—emerges as the central locus of signification. It is listening that operates the transformation of everyday sounds into schizophonic kitsch objects, and the eventual transformation of the excess of kitsch into the discursive audiovisual conformity in which these sounds can be conceived as part of a seemingly authentic cultural system again.

Beyond the Patrimonial Logic: Mexican Rarities and *Disco pirata* as Archives of Postnational Memory

When I interviewed Despina Panagiotopoulou, she expressed surprise that I was interested in talking to her about a project that she considered to be incomplete. She stated that these kinds of projects operate "like post-traumatic theater in which the dramaturgy [happens when you bring the project] back to the audience. It is in that sense that it [could be] political because

in the center is the spectator or listener, and [they] can make [their] own conclusions."[64] However, unaware that Blume had uploaded *Disco pirata* as an open-access archive and that this move had generated an active engagement with sound designers and film audiences, Panagiotopoulou felt that this crucial step had not taken place and thus the project was unfinished. When I informed her of the postperformance life of *Disco pirata*, she realized that in fact it was the project's transformation into an open-access archive that allowed for that epistemic and aesthetic loop—the gap she felt made the project incomplete—to be closed. The transformation of *Disco pirata* into an open-access archive signals the potential of a postnational memory in the displacement of the archive's authority from the sound object and its possession to the affective act of listening in detail.

Indeed, listening in detail to *Disco pirata* offers an opportunity to notice how, as an example of digital archiving, this project refuses the institutional archive model while running into trouble in the way it decontextualizes the sounds of the Mexico City streets and packages them for their eventual use as samples. The notion of *noriginal* is crucial in understanding how this contradiction presents the potential of a postnational memory as it informs the simulacrum process that characterizes the production and uses of the archive at every step. From the outset, Blume brings a way of listening that, by way of his foreign sonic gaze, epistemically de-essentializes the sounds of the city; it separates them from their local understanding as noise. This denaturalization is followed by a split between sounds and their sources. Each single step in this process separates the perceived sounds and the sound objects generated by this perception from the original sounds qua vibration, along with the context that actually creates and imbues them with meaning. The sense of simulacrum is even more explicit in the development of the CD as a commodity that copied the pirate CD aesthetic in detail, while stubbornly and waggishly emphasizing its "100% originality" on its jacket, and in the performance aspect of the project, with Blume imitating street vendors in a planned-to-fail effort to pass as local.[65] Here, the references to originality are anything but excuses to playfully challenge the expectations typically associated with such an expression. Instead, they generate a kitsch surplus that further distances Aguirre Fernández and Blume's practices from any originality. Ironically, given Blume's initial idea to document these sounds in order to preserve their originality, this procession of simulacra emphasizes representation over uniqueness. There are no originals in the simulacrum; instead, there are *noriginales* that, as Rivera Garza argues, "attest to the collaborative work that shapes them" but do

not spring out of "a past that appears stable or already finished [but rather] from and toward the present, in the vicinity of the present presence of the past itself, and even of the future."[66] The postnational memory that *Disco pirata* promises hides in the excess between the newly negotiated past and the newly imagined future that foreign and kitsch sonic gazes make possible. Regardless of Blume's intentions, because there is no sense of humor in nationalism, because nationalism never affords the possibility of laughing at itself, the transformation of this archive into kitsch enables it to evade the solemnity and gravitas of the patrimonial gaze.

Mexican Rarities diverges from the conventional patrimonial approach upheld by national archives by treating collections as *noriginales*. Rather than being fixated on the collections' perceived authenticity, Mexican Rarities emphasizes the location and digging out of materials neglected by the archive's nationalist discourse of difference and their reissuance and recirculation as new documents beyond those ideological coordinates. This approach shifts the power structure of the institutional archive and questions its traditional hierarchy. Rather than locating authority in the repository and its power to ideologically reproduce itself, Mexican Rarities highlights the agency of its users and their ability to collaboratively and dialogically manufacture the archive's documents in new socially meaningful and significant ways. Thus, postnational memory is produced collectively as we generate documents that, as Jacques Rancière would put it, assert themselves as "the principle behind a new distribution of the sensible [that unites] the act of manufacturing with the act of bringing to light, the act of defining a new relationship between *making* and *seeing*."[67] The collective generation of archival documents by unearthing hidden materials, making them visible or audible, and reassembling them anew is a process that not only reveals the *inaudito* but also frees us from the preoccupation with safeguarding original objects, controlling their circulation, and regulating their representation. The latter are the tasks that typically characterize the mission of nationalist institutional archives.

Alex Rivera used the music of the Nortec Collective to sonically accompany his postnational hallucination in *Sleep Dealer* because, by reinventing the traditional working-class music from the north of Mexico according to the dystopian coordinates of globalization, the cyborg sounds of the collective become the sonic mirrors of a newly estranged future. In a similar way, Mexican Rarities and *Disco pirata* offer new ways of listening to documents that were already there but were *inauditos* either because they were discursively neglected or because they were taken for granted.

The importance of these archival ventures is not that they grant us access to something uniquely original but rather that they allow us to, as Cristina Rivera Garza argues, play these documents like a pianist plays the keys of his instrument, that is, by retrieving familiar sounds and reinterpreting and reassembling them as part of new musical discourses. As such, akin to the music of the Nortec Collective, the postnational promise of these archives lies in their ability to enable us to reinterpret these documents, thereby sounding the past in ways that facilitate the imagination of new futures beyond the constraints of the nationalist archive. This is accomplished through the affective agency of those who reactivate these unearthed materials. If understanding archives as metaphoric instruments provides an avenue to make the archive's documents anew, thinking about instruments as archives may also give us an opportunity to reimagine the affective possibilities of the archive(s). Building on the concept of the open-access archive explored in this chapter, the following chapter embraces that challenge.