Cumbia, Digitisation and Post-Neoliberalism in Buenos Aires's Independent Music Sector

Dr. Geoff Baker
Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London
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This report summarizes my research on digitisation and independent music in Buenos Aires, carried out in 2011-12 as part of the project 'Music, Digitisation, Mediation: Towards Interdisciplinary Music Studies', funded by the European Research Council and based at Oxford University. It takes as a case study a small label, ZZK Records, and the genre around which it coalesced, digital cumbia. It also explores the role of the state in the field of digitisation and culture.

This report is a summary of a longer chapter that will be published in a collected volume emerging from the project in 2016.

While Argentinean sociologists such as Pablo Vila and Pablo Semán have paid considerable attention to *cumbia villera*, cumbia's more recent adoption by middle-class laptop producers in Buenos Aires and the emergence of a middle-class cumbia scene have attracted less academic attention.[1] Nevertheless, these developments point to a new phase in the genre's history, one connected to wider changes in Argentina. One consequence of the 2001 crisis was increasing middle-class identification with Latin America, manifested in rising interest in national folkloric music and internationally circulating Latin American genres. Digital cumbia and folklore thus speak of wider transformations, while also illuminating music industry developments under digital conditions.

1. The Buenos Aires Music Industry in the Digital Era

According to a report by the Observatorio de Industrias Creativas (OIC) in 2011, the Buenos Aires music industry represented a successful sector of the economy; its total income almost doubled between 2005 and 2009 ('La Industria de la Música' 2011). The principal reason for this

[1] Irisarri (2011) is the only study of digital cumbia in Buenos Aires.

success was live music, which grew by nearly 300%. These statistics contrasted, however, with a debate entitled 'From underground to indie: industry and venues in the waiting room', hosted on 4 June 2012 at the Club Cultural Matienzo. Participants from the independent music sector complained of small audiences, a lack of venues, an excess of recorded music and information, and meagre earnings. The alleged cause of this gloomy panorama was digital technology and the Internet.

The OIC report reveals two important findings that support the more negative mood among independent musicians and small enterprises. First, a digital market was not being consolidated in Argentina. The drop in sales of physical formats had not been offset by rising digital sales, which accounted for just 7% of total music sales in 2009, compared to a Latin American average of 15% (ibid., 45-6). Furthermore, the limited digital sales were concentrated among overseas consumers and fans of Top Ten artists, meaning there was almost no local digital market for independent music. Digital distribution initiatives by Argentine record and telecoms companies had been broadly unsuccessful. There were several attempts to launch portals from 2005 to 2007, but none had prospered. There were six portals active in 2010, but the number of users was low. The mobile music market had also been slow to take off in Argentina. iTunes launched in Argentina in 2011, but only 0.5% of the population used it in 2013.

Commercial attention began to shift to streaming. Grooveshark and Deezer launched in Argentina, and 2012 saw the creation of the Buenos Aires-based Taringa! Música. The social network Taringa! has been going through a tortuous legal process since 2009, with its owners accused of violating Argentina's intellectual property law. As part of efforts to legitimise its activities, it launched Taringa! Música. Hopes that it might offer a radical alternative to the commercial digital distribution platforms of the Global North receded as it negotiated with multinational major labels and trade and collecting societies, and aimed to become the Spotify of the Spanish-speaking world. However, the arrival of Spotify itself in late 2013 was a major blow. While the Argentinean company had been embroiled in endless negotiations, it had been outflanked by an international competitor. Taringa!'s directors and users lost interest, and the sense that its music service might challenge multinational enterprises had passed. In 2013, only 3.8% of the population used it to listen to or download music, compared to 27.5% for the peer-

to-peer service Ares and 14.4% for YouTube (‘Encuesta Nacional’ 2013). There was little sign that digitised music would provide a financial lifeline to the independent music sector.

The second important finding was that 80% of live Argentine music revenue came from stadium concerts. The local music industry thus depends heavily on international touring stars. It is the promotion and production companies T4F-Time for Fun, Fénix, and Pop Art – rather than digital content providers – that have emerged as the primary actors of the music industry in the digital era. Many large concerts and festivals are sponsored by major brands such as Pepsi and Personal. The music industry boom is thus located at the nexus of large concert promoters, international stars and major brands, exemplifying the continuing concentration and corporatisation of the cultural industries under digital conditions. Buenos Aires’s ‘2.0’ music industry is primarily benefitting the same musicians who thrived under the ‘1.0’ version, with profits concentrating at the top end of the live music industry and in the hands of global artists.

This is a promising picture for transnational corporations and the international stars who attract fans’ excitement and expenditure, but less so for local independent musicians. Exacerbating the problem is a shortage of small- and medium-sized venues, after a fatal fire at the nightclub República Cromañón in 2004 led the city government to close locales and tighten licensing practices. Independent musicians and promoters lamented the lack of spaces, the bureaucratic hurdles to creating new ones, and the struggles simply to break even. Independent musicians thus found themselves in a double bind: declining sales of recordings raised the importance of live performance, yet the urban infrastructure and restrictive regulations conspired against it.

Independent labels were unsurprisingly downbeat in their outlook. Some had not survived; those that had were increasingly distancing themselves from the process of creating content, since it was no longer profitable to produce music in a studio. Small labels were increasingly operating as a service industry, offering distribution for a fee. Nicolás Falcoff, owner of the independent label Sura, claimed that there was ‘a hyper concentration, a hyper monopolisation hiding behind the curtain of the democratisation of content on the Internet’. Major corporations were profiting handsomely while ‘those who are losing the battle are the content producers’. He described corporations as parasites on cultural producers rather than investors, resulting in the concentration of profits – a view backed by academic reports on the global industry (e.g. Leurdijk and Nieuwenhuis 2012, 10).

The Production of Stasis in the Buenos Aires Music Economy

According to the Club Cultural Matienzo debate, the independent sector was 'in the waiting room', illustrating the sense of inertia and uncertainty around it. One factor was the slow development of a digital music economy in Argentina, yet institutional forces must also be taken into account. The multinational major labels, the local collecting and trade societies SADAIC, CAPIF, and AADI, and the mainstream media form a close and collusive bloc, which has historically exerted a strong hold over the music industry. Many interlocutors traced the stasis to these dominant players, which are widely regarded as having taken a conservative line with regard to emerging digital conditions.

The major labels have cut back on research and development of new artists and focus on promoting long-established figures. The majors' simultaneous strength (in terms of market share) and weakness (in terms of the general decline of the recording industry) have led them to take a cautious line. Recently, they have diversified more into 'new business', transforming themselves into content and entertainment companies, but due to their earlier recalcitrance, they are still widely perceived as a conservative force.

SADAIC and CAPIF, too, are commonly viewed as sources of inertia, resisting attempts to reshape distribution and intellectual property policies for the digital era. Several interlocutors described them as 'the analogue sector' or 'the analogue institutions'. Relations between the major labels and the collecting and trade societies are tight. The majors also have privileged access to the mainstream media, which continue to be important in Argentina. While the 2009 Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual is supposed to redress this balance by stipulating a quota for local independent music, the digital era has not yet seen a significant shake-up of the main players of the Argentinean recorded music industry. The strongest alliances are between 'analogue' organisations with a tendency to resist reform, and industry forces work against those pushing for digital-era transformations. This is a somewhat unpropitious setting for innovation by aspirant digital music entrepreneurs.

2. ZZK Records and Digital Cumbia

ZZK Records, founded by Grant C. Dull, Diego Bulacio (aka Villa Diamante), and Guillermo Canale (aka DJ Nim), began in 2006 as a weekly club night, coalesced into a label in 2008, and

evolved into a management and production company. It brought together around a dozen laptop artists interested in fusing Latin American musics with international genres like techno, dancehall and dub. It coined the term 'digital cumbia' for its signature sound, though several artists showed equal or greater affinity for folkloric musics.

ZZK's artists and their audiences were primarily middle- to upper-middle-class cosmopolitans with a transnational outlook, and the scene that coalesced around them amounted to a 'culture of circulation' (Lee and LiPuma 2002). Foundational figures included a Dutch conceptual artist, Dick Verdult aka Dick el Demasiado, whose 2003 Festicumex was a prime catalyst, and a North American DJ, Gavin Burnett aka Oro11. ZZK was co-founded by Grant C. Dull, a North American who had previously created What's Up Buenos Aires, an English-language Internet portal for the Buenos Aires cultural scene. Its music has participated in the transnational networks of Global (or Tropical) Bass; its artists tour regularly and collaborate with producers overseas; and it signed a licensing deal with Los Angeles label Waxploitation in 2011. ZZK is a thoroughly transnational operation.

> *See my chapter 'Digital Cumbia, Circulation of Music, and Music of Circulation: "El Alto de La Paz."' In R. Harris & R. Pease, eds.,* Pieces of the Musical World: Approaches to the Study of Music in Culture. *London: Routledge, 2015.*

A Post-digital Ethos

At first, ZZK Records seemed to embody a cutting-edge, distinctively digital enterprise. Its directors and artists were assiduous users of social media, and they created a transnational fan base via the Internet. Yet by 2012, with the rapid international spread of a handful of dominant platforms, there was now little that distinguished ZZK's digital tools and strategy from those of myriad other independent labels, both locally and overseas.

In fact, ZZK's artists were turning away from a one-man-and-his-laptop formula and constituting ensembles, incorporating 'real' instruments and reducing sampling. By this point, what was distinctive about ZZK was less a digital ethos than a post-digital one. The prefix 'post-' signifies modification, self-reflexivity and critique rather than rupture, since digital technology continues to be widely used. If there is a temporal aspect, it describes a putative moment after digital saturation, a state of affairs evoked by Villa Diamante's 2009 mash-up album *Empacho Digital*.

In ZZK's earlier phases, the digital had played an important role in mediating cumbia for the middle classes, which had historically viewed this genre as vulgar. However, as time went by, several ZZK artists began to see their music making as a journey into Latin American traditions. They sought to connect with the continent's indigenous cultures and natural resources. Consequently, the laptop lost some ground to traditional instruments and a more conspicuously live aesthetic.

For such artists, musical evolution or progression involved a kind of technological regression. Digital technology, rather than being the end point of a development from tradition to modernity, and from acoustic to analogue to digital, can also be a starting point for a journey back to roots – from the modern to the traditional, the foreign to the local, the electronic to the acoustic. ZZK's artists, while continuing to use digital technology, were developing increasingly nuanced and critical perspectives towards it.

This post-digital shift had multiple causes. One was the emergence of a research ethos that bordered on ethnomusicology. Having begun by sampling folkloric music, several artists became interested in learning to play or sing this music, even travelling to other parts of the continent to collect recordings, instruments and new skills. Another reason related to copyright. After signing with Waxploitation, ZZK's releases had to comply with U.S. copyright law, which meant all samples had to be cleared legally. The complexity and expense of this process meant that artists subsequently preferred to play or sing the music themselves, or expand into a band format. A third factor was the increasing economic importance of liveness in an era of declining sales of recordings. A band format was considered more appealing to audiences and bookers, particularly overseas. A post-digital frame underlines this evolving vision and treats the enthusiastic embrace of the digital as a historical phase rather than an end point.

A post-digital lens is also helpful for analysing recent changes in the wider field of cumbia. Alongside the rise of digital cumbia, a number of retro cumbia orchestras – large ensembles playing predominantly acoustic instruments and focusing on traditional repertoire from Colombia and the Andes – have emerged since 2009. 2011 saw a boom in a newer strand of digital cumbia, *música turra*, which mixes elements of cumbia, reggaetón, EDM, and dancehall.

The first two are identified with the middle class, whereas the third emerged from the *clases populares* ('popular classes'). *Música turra* is underpinned by government policies towards digital inclusion, while middle-class incursions into the traditionally working-class sphere of cumbia, too, suggest increasing social cohesion. However, the digital fascination of *música turra* contrasts with an embrace of the analogue and acoustic in middle-class cumbia. These developments underline the emergence of a post-digital ethos in middle-class cumbia and point to a shift from a digital to a post-digital divide, also running along class lines, which may be analysed through a Bourdieusian lens of taste and distinction. While transnational in nature, the post-digital ethos appears in Buenos Aires in a distinctive local form, articulated to growing Latin Americanism and post-neoliberalism on the part of the middle class.

> *My article 'Digital indigestion: Cumbia, class and a post-digital ethos in Buenos Aires' will be published in* Popular Music *in 2015. For a pre-proof version, go to:*

https://geoffbakermusic.wordpress.com/digital-cumbia-in-buenos-aires/digital-indigestion-cumbia-class-and-a-post-digital-ethos-in-buenos-aires/

The Economics of ZZK Records

ZZK's history is marked by a search for a viable business model. While it began as a weekly club night, by 2011-12 its live performances took place only sporadically, since they rarely generated significant income and sometimes operated at a loss. Similarly, international tours generated publicity, contacts and personal satisfaction, but usually produced less profit. A commonplace assumption in the digital era is that musicians invest in recording in order to profit through touring; but touring may be characterised as much by investment as revenue generation, illustrating a process of constant deferral of economic rewards. Despite positive reviews in the international press, album sales brought in only a steady trickle of income for ZZK, not enough to provide a solid platform for the business.

The key to survival was synchronisations (syncs) with films, TV shows and advertising. Indeed, ZZK decided to license its catalogue to Waxploitation in the hope of securing syncs in the U.S. Syncs for Mati Zundel tracks on 'Homeland' and an Aerolineas Argentinas advertisement, and for a Frikstailers track with K-Mart, provided a crucial lifeline to both artists and label.

Nevertheless, placing syncs at the centre of financial strategy is risky. 'It's like waving a wand', admitted Dull. 'You can't depend on it. It's a one in a million shot.'

Despite its international reputation, ZZK's finances were generally fragile. Its predicament underlined the difficulty in converting prestige into economic sustainability. Independent labels and musicians exist through a mix of economies of sacrifice, gift and exchange, alongside more standard industry models (Ochoa and Botero 2008). In Buenos Aires, much work depended on favours from friends, discounted rates, or exchanges of services. ZZK was also cross-subsidised by its directors' portfolios of activities. Indeed, most independent musicians cross-subsidised their art from other activities, whether musical or non-musical.

Many musicians displayed a non-profit brand of entrepreneurialism. The independent music sector is traversed by the ideologies of post-neoliberal new social movements as well as independent rock, producing a cultural field in which corporations are often viewed askance, independence is valorised, and anti-establishment or hippy subjectivities are commonplace. For example, most of ZZK's artists and its two Argentinean directors were open about their distaste for the business aspects of the label. ZZK Records generally styled itself as a collective rather than a company. Digital musicians uploaded their music for free, created netlabels, or started online radio shows. More than generating profit, these activities required investment. Digital technologies allowed artists to inhabit the music scene in a variety of roles but also with a variety of relationships to the business of music. The independent scene included a vein of digital amateurism that saw individuals actively opting for non-monetised or non-profitable musical activities and accumulating cultural and symbolic capital in the form of Internet likes, plays and free downloads. They were critical of entrepreneurialism when oriented towards business, yet engaged with it enthusiastically in small-scale enterprises with a non-profit ethos.

Disintermediation?

Grant Dull described the birth of ZZK Records as almost an accidental move by three inexperienced friends. However, consolidating the enterprise had required them to engage with the established music industry in the global North. 'New technology, old structures' was his pithy summary of this experience.

Economic opportunities for 'global' genres are still concentrated in the World Music industry. Ambitious Latin American artists and labels target the European summer festival circuit. The newer Global Bass scene thus serves more as a gateway into the structures of the old industry than their replacement (Marshall 2010). ZZK started out as a collective of independent laptop artists, yet its biggest success to date has been La Yegros, a singer backed by two songwriters and a band whose sound is notably folkloric, if with a contemporary flavour. The surest route to success lay in deferring to old structures and aesthetic paradigms rather than stressing new technology.

ZZK worked with a complex network of intermediaries on three continents. Agents and publicists were important, as was attending international trade fairs like Womex and SXSW, looking to impress promoters and bookers. Real money moved around behind the digital free-for-all of social media. ZZK's experiences suggest that disintermediation is less marked than is sometimes supposed. If some traditional middlemen are indeed declining in importance, others are rising; the field of intermediaries is thus being reconfigured rather than removed (Baym 2010). For many artists from the global South with international ambitions, industry rules have not changed substantially: while they avail themselves of the new digital tools for publicity and marketing, they also need the services of overseas agents in order to insert themselves into established commercial circuits – new technology *and* old structures.

Other digital cumbias

Other currents of laptop cumbia have emerged in Buenos Aires. Around 2000, DJ Taz, DJ Yankee and Pablo Lescano fused cumbia, EDM and dub in a project called Su Majestad La Cumbia. DJ Taz attempted a comeback in 2012 alongside two young former disciples, Negro Dub and Che Cumbé, who had been organizing large dances under the name of Colombia Fest. Their primary audience was found among the *bailanta* public, and their dub versions of Colombian cumbia appealed particularly in the Zona Norte.

In 2011, *música turra*, a new subgenre, emerged from the commercial cumbia industry, epitomised by Los Wachiturros. Many similar *música turra* groups soon appeared, appealing mainly to younger listeners from the popular classes in the Zona Sur. Música turra's sound was new, but its economic model came from its predecessor, cumbia villera (Magariños and Taran

2009). Recorded music is distributed freely in order to drum up interest, and the money is made at the gate of the bailantas. Música turra is the only subgenre of digital cumbia to derive significant income from live performance (fees and royalties).

Música turra is a remix culture, involving fans as well as producers. YouTube is awash with home-made remixes of Los Wachiturros' hit 'Tírate un paso', set to videos of The Simpsons or El Chavo, and home videos of teenagers dancing the song's choreography. The rise of música turra coincided with the global success of South Korean K-Pop and particularly Psy's 'Gangnam Style', in which fans' imitation of choreographies played a key part in their engagement. Los Wachiturros' success had much to do with the opportunities to interact with their music – to share it, remix it, dance to it, and post videos of dancing to it.

Música turra is thus highly adapted to local digital conditions. While other, more formal and middle-class sectors of the Argentinean music industry were wrestling with pay-per-download and streaming, música turra focused on fans freely sharing music online. Wikström (2012) argues that the music industry is likely to shift away from the current ownership and access models towards a 'context' model that allows users to 'do things' with music. Música turra might therefore be regarded as a forward-looking sector of the Argentinean music industry.

Laptop cumbia is also distributed by netlabels, which release digital-only albums for free, constituting a 'nonprofit popular music sector' built on technological and legal changes (Galuszka 2012). Their owners often view the selling of music askance, and some strike defiantly anti-materialistic poses. Buenos Aires-based netlabel Cabeza began its self-presentation: 'In early 2008 Lucas Luisao and Martin "negromoreno" Moreno joined forces to shape one of the least profitable projects on earth'. A digital cumbia blogger, Cumbiónico, proclaimed: 'Showing oneself free to distribute music for free […] is a radical form of protest against the capitalist model of cultural production'. A netlabel is thus often a labour of ideology and a statement about free circulation, one that requires investment rather than generating direct revenue. Netlabels are pared-down operations that offer one important advantage: speedy turnaround. There is minimal risk of a cutting-edge sound being blunted or overtaken because of a drawn-out release schedule. Netlabels are thus closely attuned to the rapid temporality of fast-evolving contemporary digital dance music genres.

3. Cultural Industries, Institutions and Policies

In 2012-13, it was in the realm of cultural policy that the most distinctive local developments relating to music and digitisation could be observed. However, transitions from theory into practice were limited, making it hard to judge the long-term significance of these new initiatives. Also, conflicting movements could be observed, producing a field in flux but without a clear sense of direction.

The issue of intellectual property and culture serves as a prime example. While Argentina is a signatory to WIPO and TRIPs, it is also closely aligned to Brazil, a regional leader in resisting and proposing alternatives to dominant IP regimes. An examination of recent Argentinean legislation relating to music reveals three contradictory movements: harmonization with the global North; resisting certain aspects of this harmonization; and a looser counter-harmonization with the global South and "free culture" or "copyleft" ideologies. State-sponsored copyleft thinking is illustrated in *En la ruta digital*, a book published by the Ministry of Culture in September 2012, and efforts to create FOSS music software for the one-laptop-per-child scheme Conectar Igualdad.

These IP issues play out in various musical contexts in Buenos Aires: in netlabels and other small enterprises that explicitly adopt free culture practices; in Taringa! Música, which – initially, at least – challenged the country's IP law and institutions; and in the commercial cumbia scene, which shows both forward- and backward-looking attitudes to copyright. As noted above, IP pressures played a part in the rise of a post-digital ethos within ZZK Records.

The three kinds of digital cumbia described in this report are underpinned by three different approaches to IP. ZZK Records is increasingly focused on securing syncs, which depend on the exploitation of neighbouring rights; the current IP regime is thus central to its economic strategy. Música turra shows little interest in neighbouring rights and, by focusing on live performance fees and royalties, reverts in practice to the copyright regime of the pre-neighbouring rights era. Netlabels, meanwhile, subscribe to a newer, alternative IP regime of free culture and Creative Commons licenses. The existence of three varieties of a musical sub-genre in the same city operating according to three different IP paradigms reveals a sphere of music and IP in flux.

My chapter Harmonizing Copyleft and Right in Argentina *will be published by Duke University Press in a collected volume emerging from the project in 2016.*

In April 2013, the Argentinean Cultural Industries Fair (MICA) took place at Tecnópolis, organized by the Ministry of Culture's National Office of Cultural Industries (NOCI). MICA provided a graphic illustration of the disputed territory of IP and culture in Argentina. SADAIC, CAPIF and AADI had sponsored a space, Café de la Música, hosting a series of talks defending their traditionalist vision of music and IP. A few yards away, the 'hackathon', a project devoted to developing free music hardware and software, was taking place. Elsewhere in the building, public talks included presentations by Taringa! Música and strident IP critic Beatriz Busaniche, and a debate on digital culture by a distinguished panel that articulated a critical vision of the current IP regime. NOCI's director, Rodolfo Hamawi, organised a public meeting between Taringa! and its principal adversaries (the trade and collecting societies), who met to sign a letter of intent. A progressive branch of the state thus attempted to broker a compromise on IP issues between a forward-looking digitally focused enterprise and backward-looking analogue-era institutions.

MICA thus displayed both the conservative positions and resulting stasis discussed above, and also a sense that new, more progressive cultural ideologies and policies were coalescing. The state positioned itself at the centre: it hosted the event; it occupied the middle ground between Taringa! and the 'analogue' institutions, between copyleft and copyright; and it argued that its involvement was crucial to the healthy development of the cultural industries.

State digital initiatives

Recognizing the potential of new technologies to advance its social and political goals, the government has become a leading actor in the field of digitisation. Flagship schemes such as Argentina Conectada, Open Digital Television, Conectar Igualdad, and Tecnópolis are all framed in terms of promoting national autonomy, sovereignty, and identity. They are presented as motors of social and cultural inclusion more than economic development. There are, therefore, close connections between the state's digital strategy, political agenda, social mission, and cultural vision. Increasingly, the digital and the cultural go hand in hand, for example in the programs Puntos de Cultura and Igualdad Cultural. The latter aims to use new technologies to

open up cultural production, distribution, and consumption to every corner of Argentina. One planned subproject entails the creation of an Online Music Bank for disseminating music but also facilitating the fulfilment of the quota for national music on the radio. Plataforma Argentina de Música (PAM), a state-backed online music platform aimed at promoting the Argentinean music industry to distributors, labels, and festivals around the world, was launched at MICA.

These projects are noteworthy, but many were still progressive dreams more than concrete realities at the time of my research. It was thus unclear when or whether state music and digitisation projects would take significant effect. Many appeared poorly coordinated, sometimes even in contradiction, and somewhat invisible in practice. Nevertheless, they might be understood as attempts by progressive voices within the state to promote change in a sector dominated by more conservative institutions and individuals. Progress was always likely to be slow and laborious in the face of the indifference or contrary interests of a static local private sector and multinational enterprises with considerably larger budgets.

It would be a mistake, then, to regard slow progress as simply a sign of insignificance. Some of the most dynamic figures in the digital music sphere moved towards increasing involvement with the state. Fer Isella, who made his name as a music entrepreneur, directed the music section of MICA 2013 and led the launch of PAM, while Tatu Estela gave up his job as director of Taringa! Música in mid-2014 to take up the post of Coordinator of New Technologies at the Ministry of Culture. Arguably, the public sector is more dynamic and appealing than the private sector in Argentina at present with regard to the intersection of music and new technologies.

‘Where are the cultural industries heading?’

NOCI’s book *En la ruta digital* represents an important strand of the government’s thinking on culture and digitisation. Hamawi argues for the Internet as a tool of public service rather than private enterprise, while Jorge Coscia (then Minister of Culture) writes of ‘designing an egalitarian and redistributive digital policy’. The market is portrayed as exclusionary and restrictive, and authors promote the state as guarantor of social inclusion, democratisation of culture, and access to knowledge. *En la ruta digital* may be seen as an attempt by progressive voices within and around the Ministry of Culture to formulate a vision of Argentina’s cultural

industries for the post-neoliberal as well as the digital era, and indeed positing digital technology as a powerful mediator of a post-neoliberal agenda.

'Where are the cultural industries heading?' asked a debate on the book at MICA. Martín Becerra, a politically influential media scholar, identified two policy phases since 2003: the first saw a bolstering of the traditional media and cultural industries in the wake of the 2001 crisis; the second, beginning around 2008, saw a deeper, more politicised questioning of the whole model. This second phase, in which the state has been more active, has seen the first articulations of a post-neoliberal reconfiguration of the cultural industries, a shift that might be summarized as moves to democratize access, balance the economic and the social, and redistribute profits from corporations to creators. Certainly, statements of intent are more apparent than actual reconfigurations at this juncture. Nevertheless, concrete examples can be seen in state initiatives such as Igualdad Cultural, PAM, the 2009 media law (with its quota for Argentinean independent music on the radio), and the 2012 National Music Law, aimed primarily at stimulating the independent music sector.

Collectivism

A commonplace local reading of Buenos Aires's music industry was that it was 'behind', the implication being that it differed from that of the Global North in terms of its position on a developmental curve rather than following a different trajectory. A clue to a different reading, however, was provided by Nicolás Falcoff of Sura. In Falcoff's vision, Buenos Aires's independent music scene, rather than presenting an inferior version or belated copy of industry developments in the Global North, displays a search for alternatives to digital capitalism. His position is inspired more by social movements than capitalist entrepreneurialism, by a search for sustainability more than profit and growth.

At the core of Falcoff's vision was collectivism, which was also a feature of the middle-class cumbia scene, not just in ZZK Records but also in large cumbia orchestras like La Delio Valdez, Sonora Marta la Reina, Orkesta San Bomba, and Cumbia Club La Maribel, which emerged from 2009. With one to two dozen players, they stressed sociability over financial gain. New state initiatives, too, were focused less on individualist entrepreneurialism than on collaboration.

‘Collectives are the central actors of this new culture’, stated the Ministry of Culture program Recalculando.

Post-neoliberal reimaginings of the cultural industries are therefore emerging from the independent music sphere, cultural officials and academics, both autonomously and in conjunction. The growing collectivist ethos in the independent music sector evidences the confluence of state and civil society ideologies, and of post-neoliberal politics and subjectivities. Collectivism represents a vision of resistance among low- and mid-level actors to the intensifying corporatisation and concentration of the music industry, and may come to constitute a significant response to digital conditions in Argentina.

Argentina in regional context

An inspiration for Recalculando is Brazil’s Fora do Eixo (FdE), a national network of collectives that has been working to increase performing opportunities for independent musicians outside the structures of the mainstream music industry. According to Jéferson Assumção (2013), FdE has brought a third player into the equation, alongside the state and the market: the community or collective. Assumção’s adaptation of the state/market/civil society triad illustrates the extent to which collectivism is shaping social, cultural and political imaginaries in post-neoliberal Latin America, and the same is true in the technological sphere. Regional conceptions of the Internet revolve to a considerable degree around his third term (Garrido 2012; Horst 2011). The emergent collectivism in Brazilian and Argentinean independent music scenes is thus underpinned by particular local understandings of the Internet.

One might therefore identify several distinctive features of the independent music sector in these countries. One is collaboration between the state and the independent sector, based on a questioning of digital capitalism and its effects on smaller players. A second is collectivism: if the spread of digital technology fostered a ‘do it yourself’ ethos in the 1990s, recent years have seen the rise of ‘do it together’. A third is the particular characteristics of Internet use, which focuses on digital inclusion and networked sociality and thus supports the collectivist paradigm.

Viewing Argentina through the lens of Assumção’s triad of state, collective, and market, three conceptions of digital technology appear to be at stake. For the state, digital technology is primarily a technology of social justice and cultural participation; for the collectivist paradigm, a

technology of social aggregation and networking; and for the market, a technology of economic development and profit. In relation to the independent music sector, with commercial digital initiatives struggling, it is arguably in the first two realms that the most interesting developments are taking place, and the first two ideologies of the digital are gaining ground. The state's digital initiatives and the collectivist movements, and their mutual interactions, are aspiring to shape a post-neoliberal music industry, and their efforts, however nascent, constitute Argentina's distinctive contribution to global music industry debates.

Conclusion

In 2014, several of the enterprises and initiatives considered in this chapter were struggling either to get off the ground or to continue operating. The 'active state' had formulated ambitious, progressive plans for digitalisation and culture, yet it was not having much impact on musicians or the circulation of music. Its digital music initiatives like PAM made little dent in the dominance of Facebook and YouTube. Taringa! Música, too, had failed to challenge the hegemony of behemoths from the Global North.

Nevertheless, the significant impact of Fora do Eixo and Puntos de Cultura in Brazil suggests that equivalent programs supported by the Argentinean state, however small at present, are worth following, particularly after the elevation of culture's institutional status from a *secretaría* to a full-blown *ministerio* in 2014. The new minister, Teresa Parodi, placed alternative culture and self-management at the centre of her vision.

There were also more optimistic assessments. An update by the OIC in late 2012 revealed that the local music industry's rate of growth had increased, and revenue from live music continued to rise exponentially.[2] Digital sales had increased fourfold. The Digital Music Reports for 2012 to 2014 reported strong growth across the region and predicted a bright future for the digital music business in Latin America.

The aptness of the metaphor of the waiting room is debatable: the independent sector's struggles have been going on for over a decade in Buenos Aires, so perhaps this is actually the destination. The metaphor serves, however, to capture the sense of uncertainty within the sector, which

[2] http://oic.mdebuenosaires.gov.ar/system/objetos.php?id_prod=472&id_cat=1.

senses change coming but is pulled in several directions at once. The city government's Opción Música regards the local music industry as needing to be brought up to date with developments in the global North. The Ministry of Culture and NOCI look to other sources of inspiration, such as the egalitarian, redistributive cultural policies of Brazil. In both cases, Argentina is seen as behind, and policies are designed to pull it forwards, though in different directions, illustrating divergent orientations to two rival spheres of influence on Argentina – the global North and Latin America – and to the neoliberal and post-neoliberal ideologies that compete in Buenos Aires's cultural sector. Complicating the picture further are the old 'analogue' institutions that have tended to resist both of the competing new models. It is unsurprising, then, that the independent music sector feels like it inhabits a waiting room.

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