

DISENCOUNTERS BETWEEN MUSIC'S ALLURE AND THE EXPEDIENCY OF CULTURE IN COLOMBIA

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Abstract: In recent years the idea of “culture as resource” has been hailed as a new epistemological paradigm for assigning value and significance to artistic practice. This article acknowledges this idea as determining values assigned to art in the recent context of globalization. Yet it questions the heuristic hold of such an episteme for the interpretation of some cultural practices, especially those of musicians in a world where many of them are not so much administering resources as managing their scarcity. It thus explores the disjuncture between the idea of care of the self, invoked by using the performativity of culture as the basis of the resource paradigm, and the actual practices of musicians in promoting careers that demand investments of money, affect, time, and other resources in order to sustain those careers. In such situations, musicians often privilege other values of music—esthetic desires, stylistic options, and so on—as primary epistemic and affective reasons for determining their choices and what they find valuable in music. I explore this through the work of two Colombian musicians with contrasting careers and musical styles and practices, Lucía Pulido and Charles King.

In *The Expediency of Culture*, George Yúdice (2003, 24) proposes the emergence of a “new episteme” regarding the “epochal transformation of culture into resource.” He proposes a “compatibility between the Foucauldian notion of the care of the self, expediency and performativity” (2003, 3) as one of the means to explain the complex ways in which this transformation manifests itself. “There is a compatibility between this notion of the care of the self and performativity, for Foucault’s ethics entail a reflexive practice of self-management vis-à-vis models (or what Bakhtin called ‘voices’ and ‘perspectives’) imposed by a given society or cultural formation.” It is through the “practices of the care of the self” that a person creates “his or her freedom by working through ‘the models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group’” (Yúdice 2003, 38).

The felicitous efficacy of such a relation depends, according to Yúdice, on how well performativity translates into political recognition and action. How performativity takes shape depends on the specific context and on the modes of “performative force” that coalesce in different places. He locates one emerging form of performativity in which certain types of cultural displays become political action. He gives the example of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and discusses the way that Grupo Cultural AfroReggae from Brazil counters the mainstream political interpretation of the influence of funk in Rio de Janeiro through its own modes of cultural action. In multiculturalist times, this kind of performative force

has been particularly attuned to managing the political effects of performance in the midst of the complex relations between law and personal favors (or clientelism) that characterize the Latin American political sphere. The mobilization of artistic practice within this new episteme of culture as resource depends on managing the relation between performativity, the presentation of the self, and the political efficacy of that presentation in a public sphere characterized by a mutually constitutive relation between the law and personal favors. By culture as a resource, Yúdice (2003, 9) means that "culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for both sociopolitical and economic amelioration, that is, for increasing participation in this era of waning political involvement," changing ideas about the relation between politics, culture, and citizenship and the rise of "cultural capitalism."

For many of the musicians I have worked with throughout the years—encompassing many different musical genres but all of them active outside the mainstream music industry—the relation between expediency, performativity, and care of the self is seldom smooth or successful. In this article I explore the implications of this disjuncture in understanding the limitations of the culture-as-resource paradigm for explaining the mobilization and interpretation of music for such musicians. In this short article, I do not question the prevalence of this paradigm; major institutions today work within this framework, from nongovernmental organizations to nation-states and creative industries. My aim rather is to question the overall heuristic hold of such an episteme for the interpretation of musical action in everyday life, in a world where musicians must deal with the increased precariousness of their labor. In order to perform live music or produce recordings, more and more musicians are dependent on practices of exchange and mutual favors that do not have any economic or cultural public efficacy but that are central to the creation of a musical piece. That is, their forms of production do not translate either into forms of cultural citizenship or economic capital. What emerges in such a practice is a disjuncture between creativity and production. The chain of creative production appears ruptured, and such musicians operate with very few possibilities of turning music into productive labor, either culturally or economically, thus making it impossible for them to use it as an efficacious public resource. To be sure, the practices of exchange that enable such forms of production become a resource for *musical* production (for the making of a self-financed CD, for example) and an affective network that is crucial for musical practice. But the demands placed on the self by precarious labor actually make visible the failure of performative efficacy and question its epistemic priority in valuing music. In such cases, musicians often turn to other musical values—upholding a particular style, for example, regardless of its political, cultural, or economic translatability. Often such musicians uphold such values even above the need to negotiate stylistic elements that would potentially make their labor performatively effective in bringing them public, cultural, and perhaps economic recognition.

To be sure, Yúdice states that the relation between care of the self and performance is anything but straightforward. His book is nevertheless based on that premise and on examples of successful, even spectacular compatibility between

care of the self, performativity, and expediency.¹ However, in my experience, the translation between care of the self, performativity of a particular social need through the arts, and political or economic efficacy is not evident, except in cases in which musicians turn themselves into a relatively integrated managerial class, be it through creating nongovernmental organizations, by successfully adapting themselves to the new demands of the creative industries, or through the networked relation between institutions of the state (such as ministries of culture). But doing so is increasingly difficult. And even then, this often means that the goal of “self-care” runs counter to the performative ideal and to the idea of culture that would make it expedient. This disjuncture has grown as musicians grapple with the practices of self-production enabled by digital technologies and as they try to reorganize and enable their modes of labor and uphold the value music has for them, in the midst of a great fragmentation of the industry. The main point I wish to make in this article is that aligning the care of the self to performative efficacy is slowly changing in the midst of the transformation of the music industry itself. While the paradigm of expediency might be useful for interpreting how this music enters into circulation through live performances and recordings, it does not help us understand why and how some musicians themselves experience this music.

In the contemporary multicultural scene of digital production, we have an increased fragmentation of the business models (Lemos et al. 2008) through which production and distribution are organized, a reorganization of creative musical labor that questions the division between technology and art and the labors associated with them, and a dispersal of the musical form into multiple formats of presentation to the public—from DJs’ diverse strategies, to live singing, to the appropriation of images of live performances to post on social networks. The very notion of performance and its efficacy demands the alignment of different performative standards—those of identity, spectacle, and networking—and the mobility between them that the musician must make in order to gain recognition of his or her work. According to Yúdice (2003, 28), “the expediency of culture underpins performativity as the fundamental logic of social life today.” But the precariousness of labor that characterizes music self-production today questions the efficacy of performativity as “a fundamental logic of social life.”

The new modes of artistic production enabled by digitization have transformed the relation between expertise and performativity in terms of music production, but also in the way texts are interpreted: “At one level, it is the materials, the professions, the know-how and the professional identities that are transformed by digitization. But more fundamentally, it is our sense of the real, of truth and objectivity, of the narration of the text, of commentary and interpretation, of knowledge and expertise that has changed” (Le Guern 2012, 10). If the success of performativity depends primarily on its interpretation through a series of “fields of force” that contextualize it and give it meaning (Yúdice 2003), then the transformations of interpretation produced by digitization are crucial in understanding the senses of the real produced by the new logics of digitization.

1. See for instance his exploration of the Brazilian group AfroReggae or the Miami music industry.

In this article I focus on how decisions about creativity, production, and circulation enacted by musicians through modes of relation enabled by digitization are often more centered on the allure of the work of art *for them*, even when such decisions do not necessarily translate into economic or political efficacy. The imperative to perform in an episteme that ties culture as resource to the production of identity (in different ways in the North and South) often conflicts with the way musicians and consumers talk about why particular forms of music or art move them and move them into action, that is, enable modes of production. What emerges is a "[re]distribution of the sensible" (in the sense of Jacques Rancière) in which the imperatives of performativity of a particular identity are often trumped. Such imperatives do not necessarily align with the allure of music for people engaged in their composition through the amalgamation of new forms, or engaged in their continued creation through multiple appropriative practices of listening. What we can perceive is a fracture between what the artist wants, how people experience a particular art form, and how it is interpreted for purposes of resource management. Ultimately, if the collapse of the aesthetic regime of the arts into the culture-as-resource paradigm depends on the efficacy of performance, when such efficacy is not easily attained other regimes of the arts are used to value artistic performance. In this article I explore some of the different possible forms of this disjuncture and their implications for an understanding of culture as resource. I will do so through the work of Lucía Pulido, a Colombian singer who lives and works in New York at the interface of jazz and world music, and through the example of *champeta* music in Cartagena, Colombia.

LUCÍA PULIDO

Colombian singer Lucía Pulido came of age as a popular singer in Colombia during the early 1980s in the midst of the rise of *nueva canción* in Latin America and the redefinition of the relation between rural and urban music that characterized that period. In Colombia she was well known as a member of the duet Iván y Lucía, who sang songs in the style of *nueva canción*. When she arrived in New York in the late 1980s, she began working with musicians from the Latin jazz scenes such as Héctor Martignon, Jairo Moreno, Satoshi Takeishi, and Adam Kolker. She also began taking voice lessons with teachers who have helped her gain the vocal excellence for which she is known today. Throughout her years in New York she has developed an eclectic experimental project with her voice. Rather than singing in a single repertoire and style, Pulido produces or participates in musical projects based on an experimental approach to either traditional Colombian music or Latin American popular music. The term "experimental" refers to her participation in projects that allow her to use her voice as a dramatic, expressive instrument.

Her work is thus difficult to classify. She works with jazz musicians from different parts of the world, but she does not improvise. Her central project, based in New York City, consists of experimental arrangements of traditional styles of Colombian music from the Pacific Coast, the Caribbean, and the Eastern Plains. She has appeared on three CDs produced by Argentinean jazz composer, producer,

and guitarist Fernando Tarrés, based on his compositions and arrangements of traditional Argentinean songs. Pulido also performs yearly with experimental electronic musicians in Austria. These projects are characterized by the increasing permeability between jazz, avant-garde, and Latin American traditional and popular music. She also sings torch songs from the classic popular music repertoire, composed mainly between the 1930s to the 1950s in Latin America. The passionate love lyrics and themes of these songs offer possibilities to explore dramatic, sudden changes in vocal texture. From gradual crescendos and diminuendos to sudden changes in volume, from shrill high notes to soft, whispered angst, from the staccato accentuation of particular words to the slurring of a melodramatic turn, torch songs are a rich mine for exploring the drama of the voice.

Besides these more stable projects Pulido has been invited to participate as a singer in projects such as *Núcleo Contemporáneo*, an orchestra of Latin American musicians from different countries directed by Brazilian composer, producer, and arranger Benjamin Taubkin, and in compositions for cello and voice by New York-based avant-garde cellist and composer Erik Friedlander, based on poems by Colombian authors. She also sings with Czech singer Marta Topferova, exploring the contrastive elements of their voices in the Latin American popular music repertoire and in songs composed by Topferova. Rather than depend on the production of a single model to fit a niche, Pulido explores the multiplicity of ways in which she can collaborate with musicians to allow for the expressiveness of her voice. The success of her career lies in her virtuosic command of her voice and the different networks she is able to mobilize because she is valued as a singer.

All of Pulido's recordings in New York have been either self-produced or produced in association with an independent record company that finances a part of design, press, and distribution.² But they all require personal investment to finance recording. This personal investment involves acquiring and managing economic donations or loans from friends and coordinating voluntary work and advice from friends who are producers, own studios, manage theaters, or are journalists. All these people help her produce her recordings and stage her work, mostly through free, collaborative gestures. Gerald Seligman (former director of WOMAD, World of Music, Arts and Dance Festival), Scott Lehrer (producer and owner of Scott Lehrer Sound Design in New York), Alan Lockwood (journalist), and Bill Bragin (director of public programming for Lincoln Center and former director of Joe's Pub at the Public Theater) have repeatedly helped her with her work. Although the musicians are paid for rehearsals and recording time, their work also involves voluntary participation in projects characterized more by scarcity of money than abundance of economic possibilities. The management of this network of friends positioned in the creative industry allows for the possibility of exchange, gift, and debt where there is no money. Collaborators are motivated by Pulido's artistic qualities and the allure of her singing. The successful outcome of a performance frequently depends on managing a politics of exchange through the friendship of institutionally well-placed people. The economy of the gift (exchange) and the administration of resources seem to be simultaneous here. But

2. Her discography is available at www.luciapulido.com.

they entail very different premises of relation and notions of management, even when they intersect, as almost always happens when self-produced artists tap into institutional networks of different sorts.

The system of the gift handles social cohesion or the possibility of relation not by predicting the performative outcome of its possibilities in expediency but, in contrast, by incorporating the uncertainty of reciprocity in a relation that simultaneously involves the liberty of giving and the consequent (often tacitly understood) reciprocal relation of obligation (Giobellina Brumana 2009) acquired by such giving. This might take many forms in a modern system of exchange, including that of no return (failure to oblige) or simply the satisfaction of having been able, for example, to provide a stage for a concert. Pulido's form of networked production through friendship is far from unique. In my study with Carolina Botero of the forms of production of "new Colombian musics," a rubric meant to bring together mostly middle-class Colombian musicians dispersed in different urban centers and performing different musical fusions, we found that most of these musicians produce their recordings and manage their performances in similar ways. But this is also true of modes of production of recordings in many parts of the world since the distinction between home and professional music production is becoming more and more blurry. Musicians bring together their minimal resources with the time-consuming handling of a culture of collaboration and gift giving, upon which the very production of such music depends (Ochoa and Botero 2010). Jacobo Vélez, director of one of the most successful groups within the new Colombian musics scene, La Mojarra Eléctrica, outlines what such a mode of production entails:

This does not give us a means of livelihood. It gives us personal satisfaction, with the heart, maybe. I think there is no other option. This is the economy of exchange [*la economía del trueque*]. "Come here, I will help you and you will help me afterwards." That is one form. And the other form is that some people sacrifice themselves. That is, that one ends up being in debt, or that the person that lends you the studio charges a minimal price such that they are almost losing money with your work. And then, once one has the recording, there is the economy of the gift. If one sees a friend one is not going to sell them the record. Because, yes we have to support each other and everything, but a gift, giving your work to a friend is also good, do you understand? And then after the friend come the grandmother, the mother, the aunt, the sister . . . (quoted in Ochoa and Botero 2010)

This case outlines three main modes of exchange. First there is exchange proper, which implies the relation between gift and obligation as one of mutual assistance, and which rests on the uncertainty of cooperation. For Roberto Espósito (2010, 5) gift and obligation come together because "this is the gift that one gives because one *must* give and because one *cannot not* give" (italics in the original). He states, "[The gift] doesn't by any means imply the stability of a possession and even less the acquisitive dynamic of something earned, but loss, subtraction, transfer. It is a 'pledge' or a 'tribute' that one pays in an obligatory form." Thus the meaning of such gift giving is more "one who shares . . . a burden" (6) than one who owns property.

Second, sharing implies not property or object but a service that "more precisely expropriates them of their initial property (in part or completely), or the most

proper property, namely, their very subjectivity” (6–7). Paraphrasing Vélez, one ends up being in debt to that person that lends the studio. In Esposito’s words,

The common is not characterized by what is proper but by what is improper, or even more drastically, by the other; by a voiding [*svuotamento*], be it partial or whole, of property into its negative; by removing what is properly one’s own [*de appropriazione*] that invests and decenters the proprietary subject, forcing him to take leave [*uscire*] of himself, to alter himself. In the community subjects do not find a principle of identification nor an aseptic enclosure within which they can establish transparent communication or even a content to be communicated. They don’t find anything else except that void, that distance, that extra-neousness that constitutes them as being missing from themselves; “givers to” inasmuch as they themselves are “given by” [*donati da*] a circuit of mutual gift giving that finds its own specificity in its indirectness with respect to the frontal nature of the subject/object relation or to the ontological fullness of the person. . . . Not subjects. Or subjects of their own proper lack, of the lack of the proper. (Esposito 2010, 7)

This mode of exchange, rather than building a resource tied to a performance of identity, builds a circuit of donations that is oblique. Rather than affirming the connection between property and identity (or object and subject) required by expediency, this relation is distributed between the donated thing or service, the receiver, and the person that donates. What counts in the actual act of giving oneself in the recording as a form of *jouissance*—a “becoming undone” (Grosz 2011) in the objects through which the self is constituted. This logic of care of the self in relation to musical production runs counter to the logic of efficacy since ultimately the performative relation is minimized.

The process of production and exchange described above brings into focus the types of affective, material, and social processes unleashed by work with such forms of musical production. It brings forth a particular form of recognition: “Aesthetic judgment is a kind of *recognition*: it’s an appreciation of how the object adapts itself to the way we apprehend it, even though, at the same time, it remains indifferent to us” (Shaviri 2009, 2). How such a process of recognition happens turns aesthetic judgment into a proposition that becomes a “possible route of actualization . . . ‘a tale that might be told about a particular actuality’” (Shaviri 2009, 3), a mode of knowing. This questions the necessary collapse of artistic production into identity that performativity as resource demands. Music appears here not only as a resource but as a “force that produces life as more than itself, a form of self-overcoming that incorporates matter and its capacities for self-overcoming within its own becomings” (Grosz 2008, 4). It brings forth a form of enhancement and intensity that cannot be simply dissolved into its expedient use as a resource. Indeed the network and the resulting CD can be used as a resource for performance and production, and the CD can be interpreted by an audience as a resource for cultural affirmative action, as the nationalistic label under which much of this music is catalogued, new Colombian music, reveals. The point I want to make is that a type of interaction in musical production in which debt and the obligation of debt prevail reveals the limits of the expediency of culture as a primary paradigm to understand the motivations of these musicians. On the contrary, what seems to be happening is the willingness to go into debt, economic and otherwise, in order to produce the type of music they want to produce. The allure

music making has for these musicians cannot be easily explained as the allure of cultural expediency, even when their productions can function as a resource for them to use in making themselves known. Something else is going on here.

Pulido is not particularly interested in presenting Colombian music as a nationalistic repertoire (interview with the author, June 2010). The uniqueness of her sound stems undoubtedly from the expressive possibilities of particular Colombian music genres: vocal turns, rhythmic patterns, and instrumental sounds (such as the *gaita* or the maraca of *cumbia* from the Caribbean, or the *cuatro* from the Eastern Plains). What counts in Pulido's work is the way she and her musicians are able to combine such features with her particular vocal virtuosity. Even though her music does not necessarily fit the traditional world music repertoire, her scope as a musician does depend to a certain extent on the uniqueness created by the blend of traditional sounds with her vocal virtuosity. She does not and does not want to turn that into a representation of Colombianness. Through the imperative to perform a particular place in a world music industry, her work is necessarily tied to exhibiting a particular identity, that of a newly emerging Colombian musician within the market of world music festivals, where she performs part of the time. Although the market may position her uniqueness as a "Colombian" voice, her music, discourse, and the types of collaborations she can have highlight not her identity as Colombian but her aesthetic possibilities: the quality of her voice, her excellent musicianship, the particular Colombian sounds she brings. The allure resides more in the virtuosity of her voice than in her representation of some social category. To be sure, once the music enters a particular market, then it begins to function under the specific performative strategies of marketing categories. But since Pulido insists that she works with projects that highlight her voice rather than with a particular style that safely puts her in a marketing niche, then how she enters a particular music market category is also problematic (interview, June 2010).

One could argue that Pulido is an ethnically "unmarked" Colombian woman and as such does not need to represent any particular identity to gain recognition and entrance into a market. But that is just the point. The market for her work, although it keeps her busy, is not huge and her performances do not suffice for her to make a living. Part of the reason for this is her repeated choice to work with artistic projects in which she can creatively use her voice, regardless of what that implies for the classification and understanding of her work. In this choice, the ideas of care of the self, performativity, and expediency do not align. What emerges instead is the allure of music for the singer, for the performers who work with her, and for her audience, as that which enables a certain type of sociality and circulation in the network of production that characterizes her work. I recognize here not the efficacy of performativity but the allure of music making, not Pulido's capacity to represent a certain identity category in order to expedite the circulation of her work in the market but the choice to highlight the cultivation of a dramatic, virtuosic use of the voice in different projects.

Yúdice (2003, 43) speaks of a "field of force generated by differently arranged relations among institutions of the state and civil society, the judiciary, the police, schools and universities, the media, consumer markets, and so on." In my work

(Ochoa 2003) I have similarly spoken of a semantic chain of transformation between mediating institutions and people that characterizes the relations that are necessarily generated by the organizational work involved in producing and disseminating artistic creativity. But not all relations of interest are easily translated to produce a coherent performativity in the midst of this field of force. Rather, what emerges is the fact that culture as resource actually works, in certain situations, because of the free labor and types of sociality provided by the system of the gift and its multiple modes of exchange. If performativity is the face of culture as resource and the translation of identity politics into performative efficacy, then the system of the gift is the name of the socialities that coalesce around the allure provoked by the desire for creativity in the arts, which cannot be reduced to art's use as resource. The frequent tensions that mark today's mobilization of music within managerial strategies have to do, in good measure, with the difficulties that the culture-as-resource paradigm has in identifying the very allure of art as beyond its reduction to a logic of expediency. I now turn to champeta music to provide one example of such a disjuncture.

CHAMPETA: INTERTWINING AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF CIRCULATION

Champeta is an urban, electronic, self-produced dance music whose exact date of emergence is unknown but which clearly existed in Cartagena de Indias in the Colombian Caribbean by the early 1970s. Champeta has been defined according to its origins and social provenance (Pacini Hernández 1993), its circulation practices (Abril and Soto 2004), and its association with the Afro-descendant population from Cartagena de Indias, San Basilio de Palenque, and the broader Colombian Caribbean (Cunin 2003). According to Cunin (2003, 271), champeta

is a modern, urban music inspired by Congolese *soukous*, interpreted mainly in the barrios in the northern and southern sectors of Cartagena, associated with a long and complex history of identification of "black music" in Colombia, primarily from the Caribbean and the Pacific Coasts. It is marked by a "perversion of social norms" that seek to "disorganize" the established formal order through a highly sexualized dance and through the disorder provoked by the picó feast. . . . [C]hampeta is a counterculture, but not so much because of the content of its texts, but rather because it questions the established musical models. Even though it is derived from the oral tradition of the Colombian Caribbean, it nevertheless manages to deviate in form in radical ways.

Cunin and the previously mentioned authors highlight the social performative role of the genre in the historical context of emergence of the multicultural state and Afro-descendant social movements in the 1990s, and the paradigmatic turn to culture as a resource as enacted by both the Ministry of Culture in Colombia and by the social movements themselves (Ochoa 2003). This transformation coincides with changes in the music industry due to the beginning of the consolidation of digital production. One of the interesting features of champeta has precisely been the difficulty that institutions of the state, different types of formal music production projects, and even the champeta musicians themselves have had in harnessing the force of this music into the performative effect of an Afro-descendant identity beyond the specific confines of the black neighborhoods

of Cartagena. Historically, black musical styles from the Colombian Caribbean—such as *cumbia*, *mapalé*, and others—and more recently from the Pacific coast of Colombia have been the most well-established, popular, and representative music from the country. These have increasingly been seen as having cultural value for the multicultural nation as well as being the most commercially established music in the country since the 1940s (Wade 2000). But as Cunin (2003, 274) notes, champeta does not follow this path. Champeta is

a music that has been denied any cultural worth or value and does not correspond to the domesticated image of “black music”: in it the drum is replaced by a beat box; the remembrance of slavery and maroon life for narratives about daily life; the well-choreographed dances are replaced by straightforward sexualized moves and demonstrations, traditional dress for jeans and Nike tennis shoes; the formal places of spectacle for a street space.

Cunin was writing before Latin American music with similar sexualized lyrics and dance moves, such as *reggaeton* or *cumbia villera*, emerged on the popular music scene. But even today, in comparison with the spread of these styles, champeta primarily remains a local music scene, circumscribed by the Colombian and Venezuelan Caribbean, especially associated with the city of Cartagena and strongly linked to its Afro-descendant associations.

Champeta was forged through the traffic of sounds between Africa, the Caribbean islands, and Colombia in the mid to late twentieth century, particularly soukous from the Democratic Republic of Congo, highlife from Nigeria, *mbaqanga* from South Africa, *jibaro* music from Puerto Rico, and, more recently, Jamaican reggae. Musicians such as Mbila Bel from Congo or Mahotella Queens from South Africa are household names in the poor barrios of Cartagena—the lyrics of their songs imitated, words’ sounds, if not meanings, known by heart. The history of champeta has three distinct phases. First, what is called *música africana* arrived in Cartagena in the 1960s. This music eventually came to be called *champeta africana*. The second phase began in the late 1970s but emerged fully in the 1980s with the development of *champeta criolla* or creole champeta, Colombian compositions based on the model of the African compositions and self-produced by Cartagena musicians. And the third phase, which is just beginning, is the emergence of a new genre called *danzal*, performed almost exclusively by the highly successful DJ Dever with his Passa Passa Sound System, now with more than sixty thousand followers on Facebook (Botero, Ochoa, and Pardo 2011).

It is impossible to talk about champeta in Cartagena without talking about sound systems, called *picós*. The official story is that *picós* emerged in the 1950s, at the same time as they did in Jamaica, as portable sound systems capable of high volume, placed in the backs of pickup trucks parked in marginal barrios and used to create dance parties in the street. This practice of street listening stretches back to the modes of consumption of phonographs in Colombia. These were hardly ever owned privately but were strategically located in storefronts and other places that blurred the division of private and public through public events of listening. Hearing recorded music as a street event has existed since the early days of the phonograph. This listening practice eventually became a major mode of music production and consumption.

Picós eventually changed from sound systems in the backs of trucks to systems that range in size from personal high-volume speakers that people place in front of their homes on a weekend, to huge structures that require several trucks to move them around. The largest picó found in Cartagena, called El Rey de Rocha, has today become a musical organization with sound engineers, music managers, and DJs; it still operates out of the poor barrios in Cartagena.

Picó is also the name for a large dance event in which a section of a street is closed off, the speakers are installed, and an entry fee of approximately US\$2 is charged to listen and dance to champetas played by DJs on the sound system until the legal closing time of 2 a.m. Picós take place between Thursday evenings and Monday evenings in the southern and northern poor sections of the city; they are announced through hand-drawn posters displayed throughout the popular and middle-class barrios of the city. Despite their massive presence, picós are famous for being highly dangerous, and the reputation and mode of presentation of such music has repeatedly been denounced in the mainstream press as immoral and negative, turning this performance into a “negative racialized relation” between the city and its Afro-descendants.

When champeta is inscribed in the social relations that characterize Cartagena, it reproduces and exacerbates the marginalization and exclusion of “blackness” that characterize the city. Champeta shows us the racial designation of a particular popular culture. . . . The rupture of the “convention of avoidance” (Cunin 2003) of the racial question that dominates Cartagena, represented by the people belonging to the champeta world, justifies the exclusion of the music and its actors. (Cunin 2007, 7)

Despite this, several efforts have been made to incorporate champeta into the affirmative discourse of Afro-descent mobilized by both social movements and the nation-state in recent years. In 2001, Sony produced and nationally distributed a CD entitled *La champeta se tomó a Cartagena* (Champeta took over Cartagena). This formal production of the record industry coincided with efforts of the Ministry of Culture. Araceli Morales, a white woman from Cartagena who was minister of culture in 2000, tried to affirm champeta’s value from within the state by promoting it in the rich public areas of Cartagena and in important theaters in Bogotá. Filmmaker Lucas Silva produced champeta CDs in France as part of an effort to insert champeta into the French world music market. But beyond its adoption in a few dance bars in Bogotá, champeta did not enter the world music market or become a performative asset for the promotion of an Afro-descendant culture at a national level. Even the formation of local corporations for the promotion of champeta by musicians active in the genre has repeatedly met with only partial success.³ I believe this is not only because, in its aesthetics of disorder, champeta challenges histories of appropriate musicality of blackness within the Colombian popular and folkloric music ethos, as Cunin states, but also because the types of artistic elements valued in champeta do not easily lend themselves to consumption beyond the local scene. These elements, however, are precisely those that make the music so attractive to the Afro-descendant population of Cartagena.

3. For a detailed history of such processes of “failed” incorporation see Cunin 2007.

According to Sanz (2011), there is a close relation between the picó as an event and champeta music. Even if there are hit songs that people remember, their success is intimately related to the experience of the party at the picó, the sound system as the main means of transmission, and the dance. The reception of songs or their aesthetic recognition is not isolated (even if they are sold as part of CDs and constitute specific hits) but is part of a listening assemblage that carries the mode of recognition of the song in multiple acoustic experiences. The circulation of the product cannot be thought of as separate from the experience of the party. Picós produce "exclusive hits" (*exclusivos*) that are associated with a particular picó. People then attend one or another picó on the basis of which one is performing their favorite hits. The main reason for attending is to dance to champeta music. The dance is a highly sexualized dance that emerged well before reggaeton or cumbia villera used such moves in their music. The feet hardly move, staying mostly in one place, while the upper and middle bodies move tightly in rhythm against each other (Sanz 2011). The musicians and dancers refer to videos of soukous dances as the model from which they took some of these erotic moves. People who go to dance also go to hear the exclusive hit being produced by a particular picó for that weekend.

Currently, the champeta songs to be played in a picó are prerecorded in one of five or six existing studios in Cartagena, using both live musicians and prerecorded samples of African music downloaded from the Internet. The recording process is generally paid for by one of the picó owners or organizers, who then owns the song as a product. The process of composition varies from one singer and studio owner to another. Generally, the lyrics and melody are written by a singer who is recognized as the author of the song, and the arrangement is made in the studio, where the song is recorded by the arranger and/or the owner of the studio. A new song is performed at a live picó by a DJ, who plays it repeatedly throughout the night. The repetition involves not only the song itself but a repeated performance of the chorus and fragments of the song. The DJ plays ten seconds of the song, backtracks, plays fifteen seconds, backtracks, plays twenty seconds, backtracks, repeats, and so on. By the end of the night, the majority of the public at the picó is able to sing at least the chorus of the song by heart. If the song "sticks," then a new hit has been established. The song is sold the next day through a network of pirated record distributors at a very low price of US\$1. Most of the CDs are sold in Bazurto, the popular street market in Cartagena. The picó also hires the production of a DVD that is also prerecorded through a simulated feast (Sanz 2011). While the CD contains the songs so they can be heard repeatedly, the DVD contains all the acoustic and visual elements of the party. Some of the most important elements that provide the allure of this music are found in the way the CD and DVD productions translate the live experience into audio and audiovisual formats. DVD productions are called *volúmenes* (volumes), as opposed to simple reproduction of MP3 digital audio files that contain only the songs.

One of the most important characteristics of champeta music is the high volume, called *el meke* in Cartagena. Javier Acosta, the sound engineer of El Rey de Rocha, says:

the dancer is very demanding and likes certain sounds, for example the basses. The basses should be so exaggerated that the acoustic pressure moves the body, the clothes move. The high-end notes should be strident [*brillos*]. . . . The capacity of El Rey de Rocha is 70,000 watts. But usually I handle 50,000 real watts, in a big party. . . . sometimes we cannot use that much power toward the outside because it is harmful for neighbors. In Chambacú [one of the barrios of Cartagena] for example, when we place the sound system facing toward Bocagrande [a tourist district in the city], all the car alarms get activated with the frequency of the bass. . . . You know, people from the outside come to the city to rest, looking for a place with no noise, tranquility. And here we are playing those systems as if they were an earthquake. Immediately they complain and we need to lower the power [*la potencia*]. (Javier Acosta, quoted in Botero, Ochoa, and Pardo 2011, 50)

Three elements appear here that are crucial for the circulation of champeta. The first is a listener who is a dancer, who listens with the whole body, who wants to feel the vibrational impact of sound on the body and even on their clothes: "I like the sound to move my shirt." Second, there is a profound consciousness of the emplacement of sound. Used in certain places, these sound systems cross the boundaries between a city made for tourism and international conferences, and a city that lives on the margins. Cartagena has, in recent years, undergone a drastic urban reform. The city center, conveniently surrounded by a walled structure built during the colonial period and referred to as the walled city (*la ciudad amurallada*) has become one of the hot spots for international conferences in the Caribbean, and its private houses are available only to the extremely rich or to international investors. Meanwhile, the population of the surrounding poor neighborhoods has increased drastically due to the displacement of population in the small towns of the interior Caribbean because of the armed conflict. Cartagena is thus divided into three cities: the gentrified historic city center, the high-class neighborhoods and tourist districts outside the historic city, and the poor neighborhoods. Thus a historically racialized city has become even more so through urban reform.⁴ As stated by champeta singer Charles King, "in a few years, we are going to need passports to go into the walled city" (personal comment to the author).

Loudness becomes noise when it defaces the city's architectural reform. Champeta functions by making audible the margins and the fiction of the walled city. What it exposes is not the other of a recognized public sphere but rather its public secret: that which moves between the acknowledged and the unacknowledged in the city's highly racialized spacialization, between the legal and illegal in the forms of record production and distribution, between the outside and the inside of the walled city. Champeta exposes that which pushes the borderlines of the acceptable while exhibiting the unacceptable, simultaneously outside and within the realm of the law.

As has been repeatedly analyzed in Latin America and the Caribbean, such margins are anything but marginal: they are the constitutive slipperiness of a mo-

4. For information on the social composition of Cartagena, employment numbers, and urban reform, see *Perspectivas del medio ambiente urbano: GEO Cartagena* (Cartagena: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente, la Alcaldía de Cartagena de Indias, el Establecimiento Público Ambiental de Cartagena-EPA Cartagena, y el Observatorio del Caribe Colombiano, 2009), www.pnuma.org/deat1/pdf/2009 - GEO Cartagena.pdf.

dernity characterized by a multitemporal heterogeneity, a world system in which the colonial and the modern intimately and politically produce rather than supersede one another, a history of political conditions of exclusion and exploitation that have for centuries blurred the boundary line between the human and nonhuman, as, for example in the treatment of slaves as things (Palmié 2002), or in the historical question of whether Indians were animals or humans (Lévi-Strauss 2005). In this world, the politics of difference are not about delineating identities; rather, the contested status and different forms of understandings of the self, things, and the world (ontologies), together with the juridical/political tensions in which such knowledge circulates and is articulated, produce a fuzzy borderline that is anything but marginal. Rather this border is constantly reconstituting itself, the objects that circulate within it, and the peoples whose daily lives are forged through it, in this way questioning how the formal "public sphere" is articulated by what Taussig (1999) calls the "public secret." In these situations the formal existence of the law runs counter to the practices that everybody knows actually take place but are not publicly articulated as official, a semi-underground that is neither underground nor mainstream but in whose production all are involved, in different degrees (Taussig 1999). This is precisely one of the motives that trumps the efficacy of performative displays of identity in order to turn them into a broad instrumentalization of resources. For such a process to occur there needs to be a movement from the fuzzy borders between the multiple forms of acceptability and unacceptability to those that, in performance, accrue resources through the official recognition granted to champeta. The only people in the current world of champeta who are gaining resources in the form of economic revenue are the owners of picós, not the musicians or the singers. The structure of circulation of the music contributes to the difficulty of realizing its potential social performativity.

Another element of the performance of a live champeta song is the use of *placas* and *cobas*. Placas are prerecorded announcements that function as advertisements for the picó. They are played by the DJ before, during, and after a song. Placas prevent the song from being pirated by recording its live performance (Sanz 2011, 96). But they also promote the picó (that is, the sound system itself) and enhance the party. Some placas fulfill the function of promoting the particular picó or the song in a public competition for listeners:

Este es el disco éxito. Tiene a los picós locos, los tiene locos.
Y es que cuando suena les da por el coco.

[This is the big hit. All the picós are crazy because of it.
Because when it sounds, it hits them on the head.]

Oyelos ladrando, ladrando
Y con este exclusivo, exclusivo
Seguirán aullando.

[Hear them barking, barking
And with this exclusive hit they will be howling.]⁵

5. This comes from my own current fieldwork on champeta music and collected recordings of placas and cobas.

The other common theme is sexual picaresque or double entendre, typical of the highly sexualized dance and lyrics of champeta:

Uy encoñaito en el rinconcito con el chiquichá chiquichá. Anda sabroso vamos inyéctala suavécito, ahí en el rinconcito, con el que sí tiene vacile, el que todo sigue!

[There he is, wrapped around his woman in that corner, with the *chiquichá chiquichá*, Come on, inject her, there, in the corner, with the one that knows how to play, the one that knows all.]

Cobas are a ritual, formalized salute that usually takes place in the instrumental part of the song. *Cobas* name the people who are attending the party and function as a social system of personal recognition in the midst of a large feast. Both *placas* and *cobas* add a layer of sound to the song in performance that cannot be appreciated as separate from the experience of the feast. Another layer of sound is added by *el perreo*, a series of prerecorded sound effects produced by a small electronic keyboard. Recently, such keyboards have been replaced by electronic drum kits that enhance the most important part of the songs, especially that called *el espeluque* (literally, letting the hair loose). The *espeluque* is a part of the song where the percussion patterns are intensified and people also intensify the dance. All of these elements of the song added by the DJ appear in the *volúmenes* that appear when a hit is first released. Thus the recordings are not initially simple MP3 audio versions of the songs but versions of the songs that contain all of the elements of the live event. This is not only because people like such an aesthetic but to prevent piracy. Once a hit has been established, the recording is released a few weeks later as an MP3 or CD, for those who wish to buy the song. A hit lasts one month to one month and a half, so there is a constant production of new songs, new *volúmenes*, and new CDs with only MP3 recordings.

Finally, *champeta* lyrics are usually about events of everyday life in Cartagena. Many of them use word play as the main lyrical strategy to promote a double entendre that blurs the boundary between eroticism and vulgarity. The highly picaresque and sexually explicit language is reflected in the sexual, erotic nature of the dance, a technique common to *cumbia villera* and *reggaeton* (but not derived from them). It is not a general description of explicit sexuality but is tied to narratives of everyday events.

The allure of *champeta* in Cartagena has to do in good measure with these different characteristics. Some of these characteristics are not easily transportable to other places without losing the reason for their appeal. *Cobas* and *placas* are about a local practice and public. The way of establishing the hit song and its relation to circulation is also local. So is the mode of circulation of recordings.

Champeta recordings circulate through the pirated network used to distribute illegally copied music. The legally produced finished master is sold for a fixed amount of money to the pirate networks, which either sell it or resell it to be sold, primarily, in the popular Cartagena market Bazaruto. However, the singers and authors of the songs formally register their song within the intellectual property rights regime in Colombia so they can receive money through the music-collecting societies. After a singer-songwriter has registered one hundred songs with Sayco-Acinpro, he or she has the right to receive both health and pension benefits. Sayco-

Acinpro is notorious for its corrupt schemes and for not compensating the musicians properly. But Cartagena is a relatively small city that functions by hearsay, and the musicians can keep track of performances of their own music. In other words, this legal ascription functions precisely because it is local, yet massive. This is the only monetary compensation that the singer-songwriter formally receives, besides what he gets from performing in private parties in homes. The picó parties are legal events. In Colombia any large entertainment event has to pay legal fees to the police, the firefighters, the city, and Sayco-Acinpro, the collecting organization, which the organizers of picó parties do. Champeta is also legally played by two radio stations in Cartagena, and the musicians receive compensation for such broadcasting. Unlike *tecnobrega*, this is not a full "open business" (Lemos et al. 2008) but one that functions between legal and illegal practices. Whereas the picó keeps the money of the parties and the money obtained for selling the master copy of original CDs and DVDs to the pirate network, the singer and songwriter gets only the payment for an initial recording (when he is paid at all), for performing in the private parties of friends, or what he receives through the collecting society. Says Charles King,

The picós are the producers. They are the ones that project us in the region and they are the platform for launching champeta music. This is the only source for musical dissemination [*difusión*] in Cartagena. Through the picó we know which is a good or a bad song. Today, the radio stations, in order to be successful, need to play the music from the picó. A song that is not successful in the picó does not become a success elsewhere. (Quoted in Botero, Ochoa, and Pardo 2011, 128)

By "elsewhere," King means elsewhere in Cartagena or the Caribbean region that promotes champeta through a system of picós. But this system of production is so intertwined with an aesthetics that makes sense in the picó infrastructure in Cartagena, that in order for it to have performative efficacy elsewhere it needs to be transformed into a different type of music.

This is precisely what is currently happening. Champeta music and champeta musicians have not been able to enter the wider music market or mobilize champeta music as a positive mode of action for Afro-descendants in the broader context of the city government of Cartagena or the nation-state. But some of the musical patterns of champeta have begun to be hybridized into electronic Caribbean dance music through groups based in Bogotá such as Bomba Estereo. Also, champeta singer Charles King has begun to be promoted independently in arrangements that transform this music into a more transnational blend of champeta music with electronic dance beats and world music allure. It is impossible to know where this will lead. But even in a music that could potentially be used for performative efficacy of affirmative action, this does not happen because the particular relation between mechanisms of circulation and the formal characteristics of the music in live performance, those which give it its allure, function in a boundary zone that makes it difficult for such an appropriation to be successful.

I suggest that the use of culture as resource does not account for all the modes of organization and mobilization of the arts in the constitution of successful, even

if limited, artistic processes of production. These processes perhaps imply an identification of artistic organization as a fluid process based more on identificatory practices produced by the allure of the arts than on the static performativity of identities. Perhaps it is time to acknowledge that the use of culture as resource depends, in good measure, on unacknowledged practices of self-organization, sharing, and collective enjoyment that have less to do with an understanding of the arts as a resource and are more characteristic of the type of recognition provoked by participating in the allure of the arts, and by practices of sharing and gift giving that speak to other forms of sociality articulated through the arts.

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