

**Sharing Sounds:
Musical Innovation, Collaboration, and
Ideological Expression in the Chilean
Netlabel Movement**

by

James Ryan Bodiford

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Dissertation Committee:

Associate Professor Christi-Anne Castro, Chair
Professor Kelly Askew
Professor Charles H. Garrett
Assistant Professor Meilu Ho
Professor Bruce Mannheim

James Ryan Bodiford

bodiford@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-9850-0438](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9850-0438)

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Dedicated to all those musicians
who have devoted their work
to imagining a better world...

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Abstract

In recent years technological advances have triggered radical shifts in the ways people produce, disseminate, perform, and consume music across the globe. This dissertation contributes to the understanding of these overarching transformations by examining the creative and social practices of Chilean electronic musicians affiliated with a relatively new class of non-commercial, Internet-based music distribution services known as netlabels. While maintaining ideological commitments to provide free access to their musical catalogs, these collectives allow affiliated musicians to share innovative works through an alternative venue, removed from the commodifying pressures that have governed the circulation of recorded music for over a century. To cultivate a more collaborative rather than competitive or proprietary creative environment, netlabel artists also generally release their works under the customizable guidelines of Creative Commons licenses, which enable content producers to offer others default permissions for the reuse, remixing, and/or sampling of their work.

Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted primarily among electronica, electroacoustic, and electro-pop musicians associated with the Santiago-based netlabels Pueblo Nuevo, Jacobino Discos, and Michita Rex, this dissertation analyzes the nature of

musical innovation, collaboration, and ideological expression in this historically unprecedented context. It applies the art world theory of Howard Becker (1983) to explore how musicians realize their works and reconceive what is artistically possible in relation to evolving creative circumstances. It relates theories of public discourse and community formation to the realities of new media fragmentation as it examines how netlabels provide a platform for artists to collaborate, communicate, and establish expansive social networks bound by shared aesthetics and social convictions. Incorporating theories of artistic experimentalism, this dissertation further investigates the ideological dimensions of the netlabel movement and their relationship to leftist social movements in Latin America. Lastly, this work offers a musicological case study illuminating a broader transnational paradigm shift in the nature of cultural production and dissemination. According to Creative Commons co-founder Lawrence Lessig (2008), this shift reflects a transition from the “read only” model of the past century, marked by passive consumption and the strictly commercial exchange of media culture, to the more democratic and participatory “read/write” model of the digital era.

Chapter I

Introduction: Sharing Sounds

A cold October Andean rain hastened my ascent up the steps and through the pillared vestibule of the impressive, neoclassical edifice housing Santiago's *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo* (Museum of Contemporary Art). This architectural landmark, rising from the scenic *Parque Forestal* in the capital's *Bellas Artes* district, stands surrounded by a modern urban landscape that defies the geologic instability beneath its ever-more skyward reaching structures. The building belongs to another era, acting as a stone embodiment of the more conservative tendencies of Chilean culture that adulate the nation's Iberian colonial roots, marginalize all things native and 'unrefined,' and acquiesce to the ideals of convention, order, and hierarchy. And yet, belying the symbolic meanings encoded in the structure itself, this museum accommodates a rotating collection of avant-garde artworks that speak to the presence of a vibrant, vanguard current of expressive culture flowing through Chilean society and throughout Latin America. On this occasion, I had arrived to witness another expression of this creative countercurrent, exhibited in a similarly experimental music presentation hosted in the museum's grandiloquent, three-story exhibit hall. Intriguingly entitled *Exploradores del Sonido* (Explorers of Sound), for me this would serve as an initial and lasting testament to the innovative electronic music scene flourishing in South America's Southern Cone.

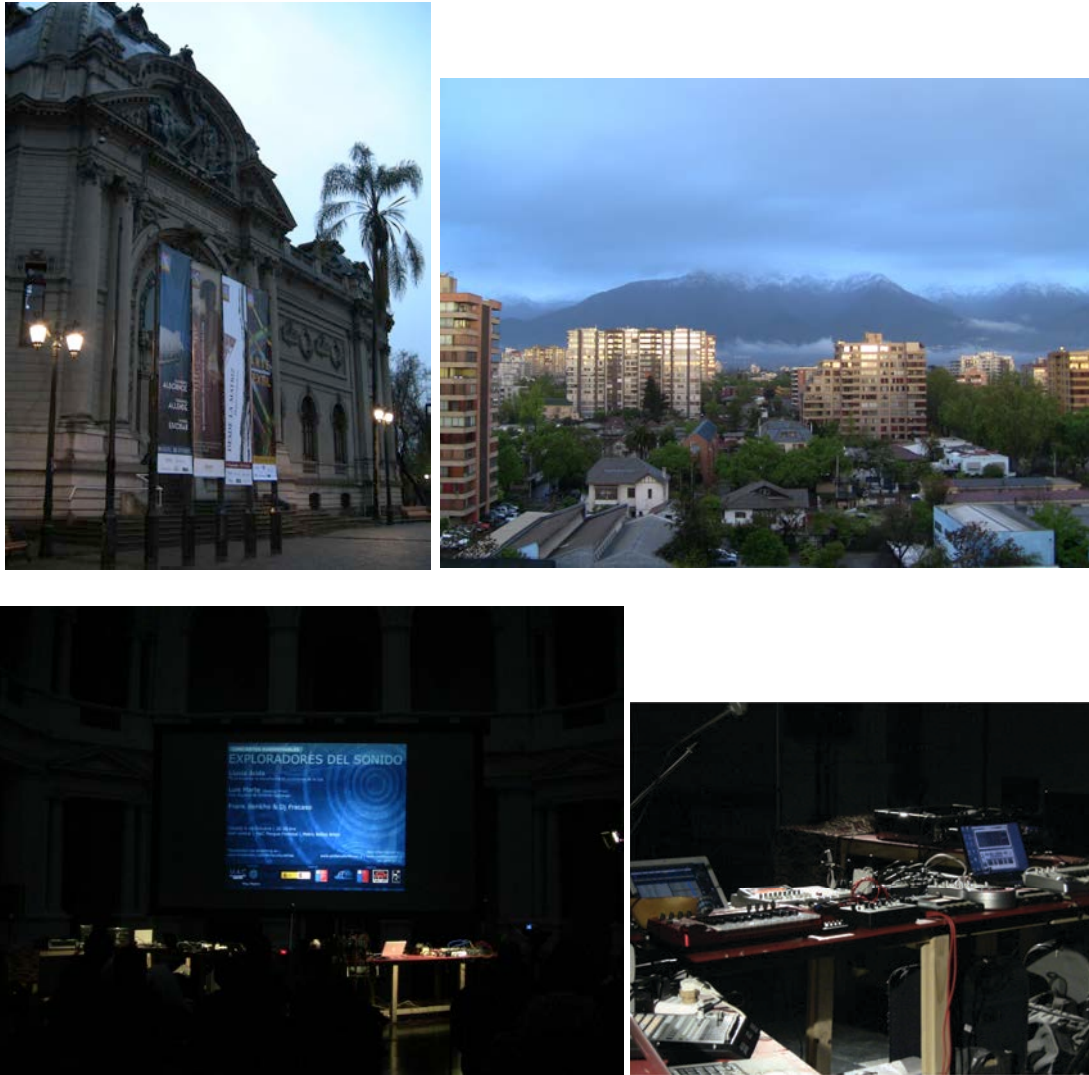


Fig. 1.1: (Clockwise) *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo*, Santiago skyline, electronic performance devices, *Exploradores del Sonido* staging.

Entering through the vaulted doorway, I passed into the museum's expansive central corridor, where at the back of the darkened room a large projection screen stood behind four tables adorned with an array of laptop computers, synthesizers, mixers, and other devices. Each displayed its own odd assortment of knobs, faders, and tangled cords, while several emanated dim, multi-colored lights that cast a warm glow over the artists' workspace. I took a seat among the scores of audience participants already facing the impromptu performance space in a wide arcing arrangement of folding chairs.

The event comprised three unique recitals, each exploring different approaches to the synchronization of electronic sound and moving images. The initial act, featuring Buenos Aires based electroacoustic musician Luis Marte and visual artist Dolores Lagrange, commenced with the tepid sound of electric white noise that arose gradually from nothingness to form the sonic basis of their entire set. With no hint of tonality or even definite pitch, Marte's contributions epitomized sonic exploration. Rushing vibrations originated from his laptop, shifting in texture and pulse throughout. Sampled sounds of vehicle and pedestrian traffic appeared fleetingly before evaporating back into the dense matrix of sound. Meanwhile, Lagrange's visual imagery exhibited similarly quotidian urban scenes, overlaid one upon another and set in constant repetition.

In comparison, the electronic music duo Lluvia Acida – formed by Punta Arenas residents Hector Aguilar and Rafael Cheuquelaf – pursued a less abstract tack as the evening's second act (see Fig. 1.2). They premiered their 'musicalization' of the documentary film *El continente de la luz* [Continent of Light], which recompiled grainy video footage from the first Chilean expeditions to Antarctica in 1947 and 1949. Casting varying modes of interpretation onto this captivating imagery, Lluvia Acida's musical rendering began with a series of atmospheric electronic tones that complemented the film's still photograph and text-based introductions. A few minutes in, the driving rhythms of industrialized electronica broke through the ambience to parallel the onscreen motion of ships setting sail across the frigid and choppy South Pacific Sea. Cheuquelaf, who began the show with an Andean *charango* strung around his neck, soon introduced an additional acoustic texture, delicately strumming and plucking the mandolin-like instrument in time with the electric pulse. And once all these layers had been set in

motion, the duo debuted their opening movement's triumphant theme with a synthesized motif that brilliantly captured the intrepid spirit of the exploration depicted on film.



Fig. 1.2: *El Continente de la Luz* promotional poster, Lluvia Acida in performance.

Lastly, Santiago-based electroacoustic pioneer Mika Martini, performing as his artistic alter ego Frank Benkho, arrived to the stage to present a stunning finale. Accompanied by his colleague DJ Fracaso, who manipulated the visuals for their set, Martini took his place behind a remarkable assortment of electronic gear. He began with a single analog sound wave, awash in static fuzz. At once, a series of colored lines appeared onscreen, dancing in synchronicity with each alteration of the electric din. In creating an ever more complex audio mosaic throughout his 30-minute set, Martini first played with alterations of the introductory tone. He modified the wave formation, shifted frequencies, and applied various distortions, all before introducing an additional signal that clashed with the original to form a steady beat. This, in turn, served as the rhythmic basis of an emergent musical cycle that increased in intricacy as Martini introduced one by one into the rotation a series of looping electronic glitches, distorted chordal

fragments, percussive beats, and static noises. At the apex, Martini approached a microphone to his left. He sang in broken, indecipherable phrases that resonated with robotic inflections. After a few moments he manipulated his equipment to capture a brief fragment of these vocals, looping them into the mix. Then, seemingly satisfied with his sonic portrait, he took a step back, swaying gently in time with the groove. Onscreen, cast in fluctuating shades of dark blue, a pyramid appeared gradually through stutters and starts as a visual index to the mystical experience that had just unfolded before our eyes and ears.

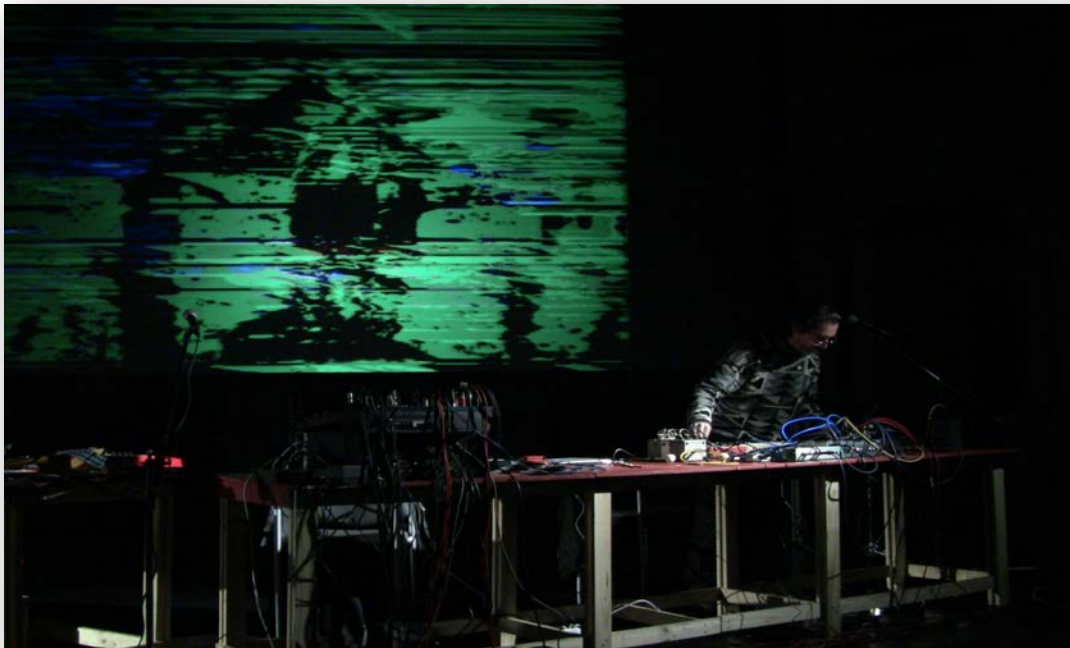


Fig. 1.3: Frank Benkho (a.k.a. Mika Martini) in performance.

In the end, the title *Exploradores del Sonido* offered a fitting description for what transpired that evening. These artists, each in their own way, presented groundbreaking performances that demonstrated their willingness ‘to explore’ the possibilities presented by cutting edge sound and visual production technologies. Indeed, their facility in this

regard illustrated how these technologies have afforded contemporary artists the opportunity to create and/or manipulate sights and sounds in ways bound almost solely by the limits of their imagination (Théberge 1997).

Less apparent at first glance, though more directly pertinent to this dissertation, the event spoke to other forms of innovation as well. Offstage, as affiliates of the non-commercial netlabel Pueblo Nuevo – a Santiago-based, non-commercial music distribution service dedicated to promoting electronic music in all its myriad forms – each artist involved in the *Exploradores del Sonido* event has contributed to an ideologically-inspired, communal challenge to deep-seated conventions regarding the circulation of recorded music. Having released multiple electronic and/or electroacoustic works through this platform, these artists have circumnavigated the content filters of the commercial media establishment. Furthermore, their participation in these collective online venues has enabled them to cultivate innovative works, collaborate in unparalleled ways, and relate to their audience and to one another without engaging in the potentially corrupting circuits of commerce and coercion.

As evidenced by the *Exploradores de Sonido* exhibition, this scenario has resulted in musical endeavors and interpersonal alliances that transcend traditional genre barriers. Further still, the online presence of organizations like Pueblo Nuevo has similarly helped to collapse geographic limitations to creative and social interaction, as artists as spatially disparate as Marte and Lagrange in Buenos Aires, Lluvia Acida in Punta Arenas (at the southernmost tip of Chile), and Martini and DJ Fracaso in Santiago have encountered one another first as part of online communities of mutual appreciation and promotion, and only later through offline interactions like the concert referenced above.

* * *

We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.

- Paul Valéry, cited in Ballantine (1984:109)

In recent years, technological advances have triggered radical shifts in the ways people produce, disseminate, perform, and consume music across the globe. This dissertation contributes to the understanding of these overarching transformations by examining the creative and social practices of Chilean electronic musicians associated with a relatively new class of non-commercial, Internet-based music distribution services known as netlabels. While maintaining ideological commitments to provide free access to their musical catalogs, these collectives allow affiliated musicians to share innovative works through an alternative media venue, removed from the commodifying pressures that have governed the circulation of recorded music for over a century. In their attempts to cultivate a more collaborative rather than competitive or proprietary creative environment, netlabel artists also generally release their works under the customizable guidelines of Creative Commons licenses (detailed further below), which enable content producers to offer others default permissions for the reuse, remixing, and/or sampling of their work.

Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted primarily among electronic, electroacoustic, and electro-pop musicians associated with the Santiago-based netlabels, Pueblo Nuevo, Jacobino Discos, and Michita Rex, this dissertation analyzes the nature of musical innovation, collaboration, and ideological expression in this historically unprecedented context. It applies the art world theory of Howard Becker (1983) to explore how musicians realize their works and reconceive what is artistically possible in

relation to evolving creative circumstances. It relates theories of public discourse (Habermas 1974) and community formation (Anderson 1983, Lysloff 2003) to the realities of new media fragmentation (Appadarai 1996, Larkin 2008, Meyer and Moore 2006) as it examines how netlabels provide a platform for artists to collaborate, communicate, and establish local and trans-local social networks bound by shared aesthetic preferences and social convictions. Incorporating theories of artistic experimentalism (Benjamin 1973, Ballantine 1984, Adorno 1988), this dissertation further investigates the ideological dimensions of the netlabel movement and their relationship to the leftist social movements in Latin America, past and present (Escobar 2010, Coronil 2011). Lastly, this work offers a musicological case study illuminating a broader transnational paradigm shift in the nature of cultural production and dissemination. This shift, according to the terminology of Creative Commons co-founder Lawrence Lessig (2008), reflects a transition from the “read only” model of the past century – marked by passive consumption and the strictly commercial exchange of mediated cultural expressions, to the more democratic and participatory “read/write” model of the digital era – where new technological resources allow creative individuals to more actively engage, recycle, and re-create the cultural discourses that surround them.

While I outline this theoretical framework in much greater detail later in this chapter, I will begin by noting that several of the general themes animating this dissertation also relate to a series of allusions encapsulated in its title. First among these, the netlabel movement may be defined in part by its commitment to cultivate an economy based on the *sharing* of *sounds* (considered here as musical productions) within a community of artistic peers and aficionados. These networks allow a new class of

primarily non-professional, yet often highly talented, musicians to carry their recorded expressions to a potentially wide-ranging audience, in a way that commercial distribution – and particularly that based on the shipment of physical products like LPs or CDs – has never before been willing or able to support. At the same time, artists working in this context typically share not only their music, but also some of the intellectual property rights associated with it, so that others may more freely engage, expand upon, reinterpret, and further disseminate their works throughout the virtual universe.

Second, while contributing to collaborative interactions that reinforce the sense of collectivism, community, and common purpose among practitioners, these innovative modes of exchange likewise parallel many of the musical practices they facilitate and endorse. In fact, just as musicians share their finished products with one another through netlabel networks, the individual sounds used to compose many of these productions are also commonly drawn from, and thus “shared,” with an infinite array of potential audio sources. This follows as many creative artists, encouraged by the simplified configurations of Creative Commons licensing and the non-commercial nature of the medium, enlist digital sampling techniques to extract and reassemble sounds found in previously released musical recordings (including those produced by other netlabel artists), and from their everyday surroundings, in order to construct imaginatively derivative works that engage these shared aural signs in meaningful ways.

Third, my interactions with netlabel participants and my analysis of their works indicates that, for many, the modus operandi of musical exchange in this context represents not only a means of diffusion, but also a key component of the overall artistic and ideological significance encompassed in the expression and interpretation of their

work. In other words, it is the *sharing* that *sounds* (as in to ‘sound off’, ‘be heard,’ ‘resonate,’ or ‘reverberate’), along with the music that is shared. Following Marshall McLuhan I therefore contend that the medium represents a message in this respect (2002), although, unlike McLuhan, I suggest that the message of the medium remains only one facet of a complex constellation of artistic and social expression.¹

Indeed, while I will acknowledge at the onset that some artists have leveraged popularity and exposure gained through netlabel affiliation to pursue opportunities in the commercial music industry (in ways that I also consider throughout this dissertation), many of the participants referenced in this work have remained committed to the ideals of the movement even when opportunities for commercial success have been available. For them, the non-commercial ‘sharing of sound’ thus stands as an integral reference point in the artistic processes through which their works are created. It shapes the anticipated frames through which they expect these works to be received, interpreted, and engaged. And particularly in Chile, this stance resonates with a deeply rooted tradition of left-leaning thought and action.

A Shifting Paradigm

Concerning the larger context that shapes this dissertation, I contend first and foremost that the confluence of recent advances in music production technology, new media social networking capabilities, and alternative rights management opportunities has contributed to an evolving paradigm shift in certain understandings concerning the nature and domain of recorded music. This transition, which envelops the netlabel phenomenon, has extended the possibilities of music creation and circulation to a wider

¹ This perspective also resonates with the views of Walter Benjamin, who argued that “a committed artist is

field of everyday participants. It has also allowed a new generation of aficionado musicians and appreciators to conceive recorded music, at least in certain circumstances, as something other than a reified and unalterable commodity.

To place this shift in perspective, historian David Suisman affirms in his book *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (2009) that much of the history of recorded music has been, “connected in some way with the commercial economy of the music industry, in which value is gauged according to financial, not cultural or aesthetic, criteria” (9).² Due in large part to the technological limitations of the era, this remained a necessary condition throughout most of the 20th-century. Musical recordings and media content in general had to be commercialized to at least recoup high production and distribution costs. Nevertheless, as a result, this field developed almost exclusively as a professional domain. Decisions regarding what was and was not suitable for distribution were left in the hands of powerful gatekeepers. As Suisman also acknowledges, the proprietary legal structures that right holders developed to protect their economic interests in this industry also served to define recorded music as a *product*, rather than as a mutable *process* tied to a dynamic and shared expressive culture (Ibid.:169).

In stark contrast to these standards, 21st century transformations tied to the digital revolution have introduced several democratizing trends (Lessig 2008, Miller 2012, Galuska 2012). The tools of musical production have become more accessible and user-friendly, opening the door to more non-professionally oriented DIY recording artists. The distinctions between the technologies of audio production and consumption have likewise

² Suisman extends this observation by stating, “Music may still have cultural or aesthetic value, but neither governs its commercial production” within this paradigm (2009:9).

blurred, giving rise to more direct avenues for non-professional artists to actively and meaningfully transform and contribute to the field of mediated cultural production. As the Internet provides new avenues for sharing the products of these creative endeavors, these trends have helped to chip away at the hegemonic association that previously linked recorded music with commoditization and with more proprietary and protectionist views of creative ownership.

In distinguishing between what he defines as the “read only (RO)” culture of the past and an emergent “read/write (RW)” culture for the present and future, Stanford law professor and vocal copyright reform advocate Lawrence Lessig provides useful terminology for addressing this shifting paradigm and its influence on cultural production. While using the former term to signify the commercially determined, one-way flow of expression that dominated the 20th-century, Lessig employs the latter to reference those socio-cultural trends that encourage music enthusiasts to not only “read,” or passively consume, the cultural expressions they receive through media, but also to contribute to this milieu by continually “creating and re-creating the culture around them” (2008:28).³

It is important to note that Lawrence Lessig also co-founded the Creative Commons licensing platform in 2001 in an attempt to at least partially resolve the legal complications associated with this turn to read/write cultural practice. As opposed to the rigid ‘all rights reserved’ archetype of traditional copyright that Lessig claims was “built

³ Lessig further nuances this distinction by noting that many of the principles associated with the latter phenomenon are not really all that new. In fact, while critics like entrepreneur Alexander Keen have lamented increased media participation in the modern era, suggesting that this has promoted a “cult of the amateur” that dilutes and diminishes the quality of cultural production (2007), Lessig argues that it is actually the read only paradigm of the 20th-century that presents the anomaly in a much longer history of creative practice. He suggests read/write practices more closely represent how “culture has traditionally functioned;” and as such, their proliferation represents a return rather than a departure – albeit one oriented to a new technological era (2008:7).

for a radically different technological age” (2008:xvi, 2004), Creative Commons has allowed artists to customize the parameters for the future use of their productions. Sometimes colloquially referred to as ‘copyleft,’ this system of intellectual property rights governance enables content producers to indicate whether or not they offer future users permissions for the creation of derivative works, whether they permit the commercialization of such works, and whether they request attribution for their contributions, among other options. However, since the non-commercial, ‘share-and-share-alike’ option (which requires future users to release any derivative works under the same type of license as the original) remains by far the most popular selection, this model has presented a new breed of read/write artists – like many considered here – with an ever-expanding public domain from which they may legally draw source materials and into which they may submit their own creations.

Of further significance, economist Peter Galuska has already presented a preliminary study that relates these democratizing transformations – including those related to the Creative Commons phenomenon – to the development and creative orientation of the netlabel phenomenon in particular (2012).⁴ His primarily quantitative approach collected survey input from hundreds of netlabel directors across the globe in order to elucidate the organizational principles and technological opportunities that have enabled netlabel-affiliated artists to re-envision the possibilities of musical dissemination. Drawing on media scholar David Hesmondhalgh’s work addressing the concept of democratization in the music industry in general (1999), Galuska emphasizes

⁴ Galuska states, for example, “The fact that Creative Commons licenses are easy to understand and use must have encouraged several music lovers, who always dreamed about being involved in [a] music scene, to start their own netlabels” (2012).

collectivism, collaboration, cooperation, diversity, and innovation as logical results of the decentralized and participatory nature of the netlabel medium. However, Galuska's work largely considers these circumstances in the abstract, with little or no detailed consideration of the actual music practices associated with this medium. My analysis, on the contrary, approaches these circumstances from a more qualitative, ethnographic, and musicological perspective that seeks to address similar principles and thus complement many of Galuska's initial findings by examining specific netlabel-related musical practices and social interactions in a specific regional context.

The Transnational Netlabel Movement and Its Chilean Variant

Although distinctly tied to the shifting paradigm referenced above, the precise origins of the netlabel phenomenon, as diffuse international movement, remain unclear. Generally speaking, however, the first netlabels began to appear in Europe around the turn of the century, largely as a result of the same MP3 technologies and online social networks that gave rise to peer-to-peer music sharing platforms like Napster and Gnutella (<http://netlabels.org/history/>).⁵ Typically set in motion by an individual or small group of individuals, who designs and maintains the web infrastructure for the site, and who may develop a manifesto and contribute the initial releases, successful netlabels tend to expand their scope over time by accepting contributions from additional participants (Galuska 2012). Due to the borderless nature of the medium, these potential affiliates may arrive to a collective from near or far. Likewise, they may find themselves compelled to petition a particular netlabel to release their works for a variety of reasons.

⁵ This assertion is also backed by a personal review of dozens of prominent netlabel bio pages, and by multiple interviews with netlabel participants who traced their own understandings of the movement's history)

These include not only the scope of possible diffusion and prestige that artists expect to achieve by releasing their works through one netlabel or another, but also their considerations as to how their own musical discourses may or may not fit into the overarching aesthetics, identities, and ideologies associated with a particular netlabel, its online presence, and its musical catalog.⁶ Moreover, for the latter reason, the medium remains fundamentally distinct from both the commercial record labels of the past, which maintained no sense of shared creative space, and the website based digital diffusion of iTunes or similarly designed legal download services like Chile's own Portaldisc.com, where various works may be encountered in the same virtual space, but without any sense of collectivity.

Exhibiting incredible diversity and range, over the last two decades the netlabel phenomenon has expanded to encompass thousands of collectives, scattered across the developed world, from Japan to South Africa to Indonesia, and especially throughout Western Europe and Latin America.⁷ Individual organizations range in size and diffusion from massive collectives that may host the works of dozens or even hundreds of artists, while generating tens of thousands of downloads for a single work, to relatively small labels that may include only a handful of artists whose releases may reach only a few hundred downloads (if that).⁸ In terms of both quality and style netlabel productions

⁶ Likewise, in addition to assessing the perceived quality of a work submitted for consideration, the governing bodies of a netlabel will generally consider the same criteria in judging whether or not a work may be suitable for release through their organization.

⁷ In general, the netlabel seems spread more widely in regions characterized by both strong undercurrents of socialist principles and the presence of free expression; and for this reason it has been relatively less influential in places like the United States and China for different reasons.

⁸ Several netlabels use the free servers of archive.org to host their audio/visual content and facilitate downloads of this material, even though links to download this material also remain accessible directly from the actual netlabel sites. Hence, indicative of the breath of this movement, archive.org alone hosts nearly 2000 netlabel collections categorized into nine language groups and referenced by dozens of genre listings. As of May 2016, together these comprise nearly 63,000 individual works; and the most popular

remain equally diverse, though the medium does attract various forms of electronic music more than others.⁹ Despite its overall disparity, however, the movement stands united by its commitment to non-commercial distribution. Indicative of its collaborative rather than competitive nature, it also encourages alliances among labels, as well as supporting online promotion websites and blogs, that all link to one another in a virtual network of mutual appreciation and support (Galuska 2012).

Amid this larger movement, I situate this study primarily in Santiago, Chile for a variety of reasons. Among them, the fact that the musical innovation and prolific output of the Santiago scene has earned considerable international recognition and prestige suggests this as an apt location to examine the creative and cosmopolitan implications of the movement as a whole. Additionally, Chile represents a society with a historically pronounced and ongoing undercurrent of socialist thought and political action that resonates with the general principles of the netlabel movement. Given the correspondingly contested nature of cultural politics in the region, this site presents a particularly suitable environment for analyzing how local artists adapt the netlabel platform to satisfy distinct artistic and social interests in a specific regional context.¹⁰ And further still, Chile's pendular political history has given rise to similarly radical shifts in its media landscape. As such, it provides an intriguing backdrop for exploring the dynamic relationship between artistic production and media dissemination in general, in a way that allows for comparisons with key media studies that have previously used

netlabel collections have registered over 10,000,000 'views,' which likely equate in large part to downloads, since more casual netlabel observers are not likely to follow a link from a particular netlabel site to that of archive.org. Furthermore, since many netlabels use their own servers or other alternatives, statistics referenced at archive.org represent only a fraction of the phenomenon as a whole.

⁹ This is due in large part to the low production costs pertaining to electronic music (see Chapter III).

¹⁰ This history includes the 1973 coup that toppled socialist president Salvador Allende, the subsequently violent and repressive Pinochet dictatorship that ruled from 1973 until 1989, and the rocky re-transition to democracy that followed in the 1990s.

this country as a case study (Mattlehart 1978, Wallis and Malm 1984, Bresnahan 2003, Mitchell and Rosati 2006).¹¹

I draw the primary constituency for this investigation from a large pool of musicians affiliated with three of Santiago's most prominent netlabels – Jacobino Discos, Pueblo Nuevo, and Michita Rex. Though the social boundaries between these organizations remain permeable and certain artists have released works with all three, each label has cultivated its own aesthetic, logistical, and motivating characteristics. Each has also followed its own trajectory in relation to its expansion and diffusion. Hence, considered together, they compose a sufficiently broad and representative field, capable of generating comparable data.

Jacobino Discos emerged in 2004 as one of Chile's first netlabels. It continues to cultivate a truly idiosyncratic blend of innovative, sample-based electronica and experimental electro-pop. With only a few dozen affiliated artists this label remains somewhat less prolific and expansive than other Chilean and international netlabels. Yet, what it lacks in quantity, it compensates through its high quality standards.¹² With its emphasis on curating often critically well-received collaborative projects, Jacobino served as an early example for several of the Chilean netlabels that have followed. It is also worth noting that this label counts among its catalog the initial release by the singer/songwriter Gepe, who has since left the label to become one of Chile's most popular musical icons.

¹¹ On a more subjective level, Chile also represents the national context wherein I, as a scholar of Chilean music, am most qualified to approach the topic.

¹² As evidence of these standards, in May 2016 the Jacobino release "Todo no es todo" by the trio C/VVV (comprising Jacobino's founder and director Pablo Flores, along with Mika Martini, and Fernando Mora), won Chile's Pulsar award for "Best electronic album." These awards are the nation's equivalent of the Grammys in the United States.

Pueblo Nuevo, the largest and most locally and internationally recognized netlabel in Chile,¹³ began promoting its unique collection of “Chilean music with electronic roots” in 2005 with a collective artistic vision that coalesced in large part around more vanguard approaches to electronic music composition. This label cultivates a broad stance in relation to its genre, hosting contributions oriented toward beat driven electronica, abstract electroacoustic music, and all points in between. In addition to this, Pueblo Nuevo’s director Mika Martini stresses that the organization has sought to establish itself as a label with an “opinion” – and one generally tied to the leftist and revolutionary principles revealed in its logo (with its three red flags), its name (which references ‘el pueblo’ in its leftist connotation as the ‘popular classes’ or ‘common people’), and in several of its musical releases. In recent years, despite some of its more nationalist inclinations, Pueblo Nuevo has also evolved into an increasingly cosmopolitan entity, as the number of foreign artists releasing works through the label continues to expand, and as many of its Chilean affiliates develop increasingly international profiles.

Lastly, Michita Rex distinguished itself with a more pop-oriented appeal when it first appeared in 2010. Founded by an all-female band of artists, including prominent acts like Fakuta and Dadalu, this collective initially coalesced with the intention to cultivate a uniquely “feminine identity” and aesthetic. Eventually expanding its purview to include notable works from male artists and mixed gender ensemble acts as well, the Michita Rex netlabel released some of Chile’s most popular and innovative netlabel productions during its relatively brief existence. As a result of this success, however, a few key artists ultimately left the label to further their musical careers in the commercial independent

¹³ For instance, Pueblo Nuevo ranks among the most visited sites in the archive.org/netlabels. As of 5/25/2016 the label has garnered 1,169,775 views, and as stated above, these views generally correspond to downloads.

arena in late 2012. Partly for this reason the label's short but fruitful tenure came to an end shortly after the conclusion of my fieldwork in July 2013.

Although I situate my investigation of these three netlabels within a historical perspective that extends back several decades, my temporal focus lies in large part with the decade beginning in 2005, during which netlabel initiatives in general demonstrated their most fervent activity in the region. According to certain criteria,¹⁴ in more recent years the netlabel phenomenon has already begun to wane, or at least to cease its robust expansion, both in Chile and elsewhere (as demonstrated by the ultimate collapse of Michita Rex).¹⁵ Nonetheless, this study deals with this period of netlabel diffusion as an important historical moment that responded to a shifting landscape of media and production capacities, while contributing significant and lasting changes to the independent music scene in Chile as a whole. Furthermore, even as the future of netlabels remains unclear (just as any technologically dependent artistic movement stands subject to the shifting tides of further innovation), I suggest that the ideological principles that underscore this movement, along with many of the creative impulses it entails, stand firmly in their ascendancy.

Art World Reformation

Concerning the nature of artistic activity associated with the netlabel platform, it is important to first recognize that in its earliest appearances this phenomenon arose from an array of preexisting, often marginalized, creative and social instincts (see chapter II).

¹⁴ For instance, few significantly influential new netlabels have appeared in Chile since 2010.

¹⁵ Interestingly, as a direct response to some of these assertions that the netlabel movement may already be in decline (see <http://bzzzbip.tumblr.com/post/39595853738/netlabels-el-fin-de-una-era> [Netlabels, The End of an Era]), Pueblo Nuevo has emphasized its continued expansion and relevance by changing its motto in 2013 to "Resist and Remain."

These impulses, when combined with the technological advances necessary to realize them, inspired the progenitors of the movement to imagine and begin arranging a new musical order capable of circumnavigating the limitations of the dominant culture industry and the creative conventions it maintains. As this new order took shape, however, it also allowed affiliated musicians to realize innovative works and practices that were entirely unimaginable in the previous order.

To help convey the dynamics of this phenomenon, I draw on the contributions of sociologist Howard Becker, whose term “art world” refers to the entire field of collective activity necessary to create and disseminate an artistic creation (1982). As Becker relates, artists must articulate their creative vision in relation to a set of established conventions, determined by all the social and logistical structures that surround and support their creative activity.¹⁶ To the extent that dominant interests control the means of artistic production and the social relations that govern them, these conventions will typically reflect their views (Gramsci [1929-1935] 1971, Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). However, Becker argues that individuals, whose collective artistic vision has been rejected by the dominant culture industry, may band together to form a new art world to produce and distribute their work as long as other resources are available (1982:97). He also suggests that such transformations may constitute an “art world revolution” (Ibid.:304-305), if they present an ideological challenge to the systems of stratification and morality associated with the dominant art world network.

Throughout this work I argue that the emergence and international diffusion of the netlabel movement illustrates precisely this type of art world reformation – one that has

¹⁶ In relation to the social field of the recording industry, for instance, the attendant art world would include, in addition to the musicians themselves, all those contributions made by producers, sound engineers, record manufacturers, broadcast networks, retail sites, the press, technology developers, etc.

evolved in the midst of the larger “art world revolution” signaled by the transnational expansion of the Creative Commons platform and by the advance of Free Culture principles in general. The “outside resources” necessary to bring about this realignment may be traced in large part to the appearance of the MP3 file format, which opened a revolutionary technological gap in the dominant media infrastructure.¹⁷ This innovation presented a simple and efficient means for the digital transfer of musical productions that allowed individuals to establish alternative routes of musical exchange – often to the consternation of culture industry insiders. In tandem with similar advances in sound production capabilities and online social networking, MP3 technology also paved the way for the far-reaching exchange of musical productions that had no place within the previous domain (see chapter III).

Beyond exploring how the artists involved with the netlabel movement initially exploited these technological opportunities to create an art world environment that better served their interests,¹⁸ this dissertation also examines how new productive and distributive models continue to “feed back” to creative and social practice in unforeseeable ways (Negus 1999:13). As composer and theorist Chris Cutler explains, “Applications of a new technology to art are often first inspired by existing art paradigms, frequently simplifying or developing existing procedures. Then new ideas emerge that more directly engage the technology for itself” (2000:104). In a similar way, musicologist Mark Katz (2010) has also introduced the term “phonographic effects” to

¹⁷ Considering the fact that the technologies of media circulation represent an integral part of the art world that encompasses all recording artists, popular music scholar Simon Frith has rightly observed that musicians concerned with altering the nature of musical content circulated through the media must always either seize the technical means of media production or otherwise take advantage of technological changes that open gaps in existing market control (1981:55,89).

¹⁸ These interests include, for instance, access to media dissemination for non-professional music creators.

reference those moments when innovations in audio recording and performance technology alter the nature of music itself.

In this work, I pursue similar considerations, especially as I explore the creative significance of digital audio workstation (DAW) software programs, which allow artists to compose and record complex works with little more than a personal computer (see chapter IV).¹⁹ My interests extend, however, to the transformative circumstances associated with shifts in the nature of media dissemination – or the “media effects,” to adapt Katz’s terminology – that follow as artists adapt and re-imagine their musical output through articulation with the parameters of media access and diffusion at their disposal.²⁰

Social Discourse, Collaboration, and Collectivism

Looking beyond questions of musical innovation and expression at the level of the individual, this dissertation also examines the social dynamics attendant to netlabels and the larger Free Culture movement of which they are part. Indeed, even as the Internet, which sustains these movements, provides a means for sharing innovative music beyond the boundaries of geography, and without the common filters of commercial media logic, it allows the people involved in this exchange to communicate and collaborate with one another in deeply meaningful ways that, in many cases, were previously impractical or

¹⁹ that allow artists to compose and record complex works with little more than a personal computer (see chapter IV).

²⁰ As a preliminary indication, Pueblo Nuevo’s Mika Martini has acknowledged that this turn of events has indeed evolved in relation to this organization and its corresponding community. He states that while the initial decision to establish a netlabel was inspired by his desire to create “space” for electronic musicians who rarely found opportunities for dissemination through commercial media outlets, a range of new and experimental approaches to form, style, content, and presentation has evolved within this environment since its inception.

entirely impossible. Therefore, I suggest that, within this evolving and seemingly boundless virtual context, netlabels present a potentially expansive public platform that serves to organize and encourage distinct types of social interaction. I argue, on the one hand, that the discourse associated with this platform circulates through the music it disseminates, as musicians share their opinions and perspectives through their works, and as others engage these perspectives in the spirit of artistic conversation through remixes and other collaborative efforts. On the other hand, I observe that discourse circulates through more direct means as well, insofar as the exchange of works tends to inspire netlabel participants to reach out for actual conversations, facilitated through email correspondence, through affiliated online social forums, and whenever possible, through face-to-face encounters.²¹ This interaction, which flows from the read/write models of participatory culture associated with the medium, strengthens the sense of common purpose and collectivism among practitioners and appreciators alike. In many circumstances, it has also blurred the lines between online/offline and local/translocal social networks, pointing the way to new formations of musical community that trouble and transcend traditional understandings.

In considering netlabels as a medium of communication, it is helpful to begin by situating this phenomenon in relation to sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas's understanding of the public sphere, and to the dynamics of communication and community formation that the broader public sphere fosters in a region like Chile. Habermas advanced the term "public sphere" to refer to that "realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (1974:49). He reasoned that

²¹ These interactions include, for instance, solicitations initiated by artists directed to netlabel directors requesting the netlabel to include their work in their catalog, and vice versa.

the formation of public opinion in this social context arrives through the active engagement of citizens who contest and confer with one another on “matters of general interest,” ideally, in order to arrive at some consensus. Importantly, however, Habermas also recognized that where the public corresponds to a vast and disparate population, this form of social life necessitates some form of mediation, and that this circumstance, in turn, allows those with direct access to and/or control over the media to have an immense advantage in swaying public opinion (Ibid.).

Given that artistic works clearly represent an important form of expression, a close relationship exists between Habermas’s views and the issue of art world constraints related above. Yet, beyond shaping the nature of individual expression, the organization of the public sphere similarly constructs the social imagination, as well as the more objective forms of social interaction that this circumscribes. Indeed, as sociologist Benedict Anderson famously observed, it is the circulation of public discourse that helps to construct the perception of “indefinitely stretchable networks of kinship and clientship,” that, in turn, enable innumerable individuals, who will never meet in person, to “imagine” themselves as part of not only a common public, but also an extended and deeply connected community (1983:6). Like Habermas, Anderson points to mass media communication, and particularly print media, as critical for maintaining this sense of common identity and purpose when large public bodies – like nation-states – are concerned. His theory also advances the notion that communities are to be distinguished, not according to any objective metric of “falsity/genuineness,” but rather “by the style in which in they are imagined”(Ibid.). Hence, by effectively shaping the parameters of public discourse – and by extension the normative ideals, social relations, and parameters

of inclusion and exclusion – through which political communities are imagined, media institutions play a significant role in incorporating the masses into the dominant formation of a society (Martín-Barbero 2006: 627). It for this reason, moreover, that where capitalist interests reign, as they have in Chile for much of the last half century, one should expect to witness the principles of competition, commercialism, and individualism inflecting not only the nature of public expression, but also the dominant social imaginaries and social interactions that derive from it.²²

In order to outline these dynamics, chapter II of this dissertation presents a historical view of media hegemony and its influence over public sphere relations in Chile. It examines how even in the 20th-century many politically committed Chilean musicians attempted to foster creative tactics to subvert these circumstances, in order to cultivate and promulgate an alternate nationalist imaginary based on socialist rather than capitalist ideals. However, I also offer this history in large part to help delineate the 21th-century transformations that have displaced the monolithic and bounded models of broadcast and print circulation, in favor of more open-sourced, Internet-based media networks that influence social interactions in distinct ways.

Indeed, as anthropologist Brian Larkin observes, we now live in a “new media era” that is more socially and economically fragmented (2008). And while this implies a similar fragmentation of public discourse and community formation, this also suggests that, in many contemporary circumstances, Habermas’s and Anderson’s theories may

²² For example, one may look to public sphere media programming like *American Idol* and *The Voice* in the United States that clearly promotes this competitive, commercialistic, and individualistic approach to music promotion. In Chile, similarly competitive and similarly popular broadcast programming may also be seen in examples like the annual *Festival Internacional de la Canción de Viña del Mar* (The Viña del Mar International Song Festival).

need to be reworked and/or replaced to respond to the “disjunctive order” that has arisen within the “new global cultural economy” (Appadarai 1996). Contributing to this end, sociologist Arjun Appadurai has responded to his own call for new theories of “deterritorialization,” by offering his notion of global cultural flows moving through a series of fragmented “scapes” (ethno, techno, finance, idea, media), which connect disparate individuals in distinct ways (1996:33-37). Likewise, anthropologists Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moore have referred to an “era of network society” in which “imagined communities are no longer confined to the territorial and conceptual space of the nation but are also formed in arenas both wider and narrower than the nation-state” (2006:2).

This dissertation explores how the netlabel movement reflects the realities of this increasingly fragmented, decentralized, and de-territorialized Internet era, where overlapping media-scapes, techno-scapes, and ideo-scapes extend beyond national boundaries. It examines how this context allows individuals to establish and participate in new collectivities that in many cases are shaped more by shared interests and commitments, than by inherited markers of distinction. Furthermore, this work considers how the netlabel phenomenon, along with the broader Creative Commons and Free Culture networks in which it is situated, illustrates how this new media paradigm has enabled artists and collectives to cultivate and contribute to what might be considered an “alternative” public sphere, where musical discourse and social interaction circulates in accordance with principles that stand outside of and in contrast to those promulgated by the dominant public sphere.²³

²³ In advancing this view, I draw from Meyer and Moore, who argue that through media fragmentation, the unified market place of ideas is being replaced by a contested terrain, characterized by multiple,

In pursuing a related theme, I also consider how the virtual links associated with the netlabel phenomenon structure the types of social interaction affiliated with the movement in remarkably distinct ways. In fact, to offer some context, it is worthwhile to contrast this work with one of the few ethnomusicological studies addressing musical communities formed through the Internet. In 2003, René Lysloff presented an article concerning mod-based musical culture and its role in fostering a sense of place and communality in an “imaginary” Internet universe (2003:40). In this work, he describes how the mod (musical files in binary form) scene developed around a locus of musical activities shared within a particular website. He also observed how participants engaging in these communities remained cloaked by aliases, while expressing few affiliations to concerns in the physical world.

However, a decade later, my investigation of the netlabel phenomenon reveals just how social interactions and musically constructed communities tied to the Internet have changed. In the later phenomenon, for instance, social relations are maintained through a network of websites (rather than one), with each almost always revealing, and often reveling in, the real world geographic base of their activities. Likewise, the themes and aesthetics that define the work of many netlabel artists are infused with symbolic and literal references to events, experiences, peoples, and places in the real world.²⁴ Most importantly, however, unlike mod-culture, netlabel collectives display a tendency to transform into face-to-face social networks through live performances, musical

distinguishable publics (2006:12). I also look to the contributions of authors like Mark Whitaker (2004) and Charles Hirschkind, who have identified instances where alternative media networks have enabled the circulation of “counterpublic” discourses that stand in a “disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments” (2006:117, see also chapter VI).

²⁴ In this way, the movement reflects Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s assertion that “online and in-the-flesh worlds can and do converge,” and that online communication may be used “to further offline concerns” (1996:29).

collaborations, and other off-line interactions. While these relations are often based in a local context (i.e. Santiago, or even the Chilean nation), in many instances netlabel artists travel to meet others and/or to perform in extremely distant locales as well. Further still, several examples from my ethnographic work illustrate that even when interpersonal relationships remain entirely virtual, they may nevertheless become as deeply collaborative and genuinely meaningful for the participants as any such relationship in their offline lives.

This scenario thus highlights the hybrid nature of musical collectivism and community formation surrounding the netlabel movement and other similar 21st-century phenomena, as traditional distinctions concerning local vs. transnational and online vs. offline become increasingly permeable.²⁵ Moreover, to the extent that these simultaneously local and foreign relations are sustained outside dominant networks of media communication this phenomenon also reflects a series of processes that sociologist Dennis Conway describes as “globalization from below” (2006).

Experimentalism, Ideology, and Social Movements

The musical innovation and social interactions that have developed in relation to the novel circumstances outlined thus far may be seen as their own reward. Artists often revel in the freedom of unconventional expression that flows when the consequences of

²⁵ My own connection to this story echoes this consideration as well. In 2010, while conducting an online search of contemporary music trends in Chile, I encountered Pueblo Nuevo’s website for the first time. Intrigued by its revolutionary aesthetic, its prolific output, and its initially perplexing non-commercial posture, over time I became increasingly familiar with its music. Encouraged by a “contact us” link, I reached out to Pueblo Nuevo’s director Mika Martini and our ensuing email correspondences led to an initial face-to-face meeting in Chile in August 2011. Subsequently, upon my return in September 2012, and shortly before the *Exploradores del Sonido* event referenced above, this relationship, along with consequent interactions with a much larger pool of Chilean musicians, evolved into the ethnographic investigation presented here.

failure are few. Such creative endeavors may also bring deep satisfaction when shared among a cohort of musicians who share similar aesthetic interests and/or who see musical innovation as an end in itself. However, when the attempt to disrupt traditional aesthetic and logistical expectations suggests a simultaneous break with the hegemonic authority these conventions represent, this experimental impetus may take on ideological and political undertones as well. This is often the case for netlabel activity in general, as the innovative music cultivated in this environment tends to resonate with an iconoclastic ethos conceived in opposition to the standards of the commercial music industry. For the Chilean variant in particular, such challenges have further paralleled a series of historical and contemporary social movements that present corollary challenges to the conventions of social and political order writ large.

Illustrative in this regard, musicologist Christopher Ballantine's essay outlining "An Aesthetic of Experimental Music" (1984) constructs a Marxist theoretical framework that begins by considering Walter Benjamin's critique of the 'well-wishing' tactics of artists who express their social-commitments principally through rhetorical challenges. According to Benjamin, when such expressions are couched in aesthetics and presented through art world regimes that otherwise confirm or even bolster status quo socio-economic relations, this may undercut their revolutionary impulse.²⁶ For this reason, he called for forward-thinking artists to alter the "means of production" through which they create and share their work. Pointing to the read/write practices referenced above, he reasoned that these shifts should turn "more spectators into collaborators," and more consumers into "authors." And this, in turn, leads Ballantine to suggest that a truly

²⁶ To this point, Benjamin observed that "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own existence or the class that owns it" (1973:87).

“experimental” approach to music making should, in principle, make creation accessible to everyone, “through a revolution in the apparatus of musical production, just as the work of art becomes in principle possessable by everyone through a revolution in the apparatus of reproduction” (Ibid.:115).

While this view already parallels the principles of artistic exchange encountered within the netlabel movement, Ballantine’s essay looks beyond base relations of musical production to explore the conceptual (or superstructural) implications of experimentalism as well. He draws from Theodor Adorno, claiming that in the presence of social domination, “where accepted realms and procedures of meaning are administered” from above, “art must not aim at ‘formal conceptual coherence’ but rather ‘suspend’ by its ‘mere appearance’ the rigid co-ordination system of those people who submit to authoritarian rule” (1984:121). Ballantine also cites Adorno’s proclamation that the “function of music,” in these circumstances, should focus on “communicating the incommunicable,” and thereby, “smashing reified consciousness” (Ibid.). Ballantine thus concludes that “one of the central irreducible features of experimental music” pertains to the cultivation of a scientific frame of mind that is “totally future-oriented: its sole intention is to produce – in an attitude of open-minded, open-discovery – the *future*” (Ibid. 126-127).

This imaginative and opened minded attitude represents a signature characteristic of the netlabel movement as a whole. Yet, interestingly, this disposition also links the netlabel movement in Chile to trends that sociologist Fernando Coronil identifies within contemporary social movements connected to the recent “turn to the left” taking place in

Chile and elsewhere in Latin America (2011).²⁷ As Coronil explains, for progressives forced to reckon with the historical failures of socialism, the overwhelming victories of capitalism, and the crisis of neoliberalism, the “future imaginary” presents a critical frontier in present day struggles. He suggests that progressive agents must take advantage of new “spaces for the imagination and experimentation,” in order to cultivate new ideals capable of inspiring political mobilization.

Likewise, Arturo Escobar has drawn similar conclusions from his attempts to outline the “alternative modernizations” arising from the same array of contemporary leftist movements in Latin America. He explains:

It has been said of today’s social movements that one of their defining features is their appeal to the virtual; movements do not exist only as empirical objects ‘out there’ carrying out ‘protests’ but in their enunciations and knowledge, as a potentiality of how politics and the world could be, and as a sphere of action in which people can dream of a better world and contribute to enact it. It is in these spaces that new imaginaries and ideas about how to re/assemble the socio-natural are not only hatched but experimented with, critiqued, elaborated upon, and so forth (2010:13).²⁸

Hence, with many experimental approaches to music making, as with the social movements of the new left, imagining a future that has thus far remained unimaginable remains a central concern. Moreover, art and politics influence and encompass one another in this respect, as each seeks to implant within the expressions of the other the seeds of possibility necessary for future mobilization and lasting social change.

²⁷ The phrase “The turn to left” refers to a series of electoral victories that have brought left-leaning or socialist regimes to South American countries like Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador, since the turn of the 21st century (Coronil 2011, Escobar 2010). This concept further encompasses a series of social movements that have, in certain circumstances, run parallel to and bolstered the agenda of these regimes, and in others, challenged these regimes to move even further to the left. Since the re-election of socialist president Michelle Bachelet 2013, the latter has been the case in Chile, as a forceful student-led protest movement, initiated during the preceding conservative administration (Sebastian Piñera 2010-2013), has continued to disrupt the nation with massive protests on a regular basis.

²⁸ Expressing a similar sentiment, electroacoustic composer and multiple netlabel participant Renso Filinich explained his inspiration for releasing works through the netlabel medium by referencing a similar maxim: “If you want to build a revolution, don’t just build it, dream it too” (Personal interview, Santiago 5/6/13).

Chilean musicologist Juan Pablo Gonzalez (2013) explains that the conscious recognition of this dynamic stands as one of the more idiosyncratic ways that many Latin American societies think about music and its social functions. Gonzalez points to a longstanding regional concept known as *la vanguardia* that encapsulates this conflation of the revolutionary in art with its counterpart in the political sphere.²⁹ In a way that bears conscious influence on the artistic practice associated with the Chilean netlabel movement (while also aiding in its theorization), this notion suggests an artistic disposition dedicated to the relative leftward movement on a parallel spectrum of aesthetics and ideology that extends between the abstract poles of the experimental/progressive and the conventional/conservative. Echoing the consideration given to Becker's art worlds above, this continuum also relates to a similar spectrum of autonomy and constraint related to the technological and logistical resources, the networks of production and diffusion, and the systems of social authority that influence the creative process.

With this dissertation I trace the evolution of the *la vanguardia* in Chile from its appearance alongside the ardent leftist social movements of the 1960s (chapter II) to its present day manifestation in relation to the local netlabel movement. I make the case that while the experimental approaches to music making conceived in these scenarios often

²⁹ While the term 'avant-garde' may be the closest approximation to *la vanguardia* in English, this translation is somewhat problematic. 'Avant-garde' tends to connote a rather specific artistic movement tied to 20th century post-modernism in Western society; yet the significance that Gonzalez attributes to *la vanguardia*, by comparison, is broader (2013), suggesting more of a spirit of innovation and experimentation, equally applicable to art music developments as to those associated with popular music. As Gonzalez observes, this concept has acquired clear political associations in Chilean discourse (and in other Latin American nations), due in large part to a convergence that took place in the 1960s, as many experimental musical artists aligned their activities with a progressive political agenda committed to confronting the prevailing conservatism that dominated nearly every aspect of Chilean society at the time. Gonzalez further explains that emerging from this period came a class of vanguard composers who "not only wrote socially committed music, but who understood their creative labor as political labor, in its capacity to transform society and form consciousness" (2013:207).

represent attempts to cultivate precisely the same types of oppositional intellectual and imaginative “spaces” highlighted by Coronil and Escobar, the resulting “new music” has often demanded the creation of “new social spaces” to facilitate its production and diffusion (Gonzalez 2013). Going further, I suggest that the new productive, distributive, and social networks associated with the spaces provided by a vanguard phenomenon like the netlabel movement – and by its historical antecedents – also represent a key element in the ideological expression that affiliated artists and supporters seek to realize through their work.³⁰ The message of their medium enhances, reinforces, and in certain instances eclipses the messages encapsulated in the similarly experimental music that it fosters and transmits. As such, the artistic project as a whole provides an example of the viability of alternative systems of production and exchange. It goes beyond simply espousing revolutionary principles to realize these principles in practice. Moreover, by sharing this alternative view of how “the world could be,” such projects provide a bastion of inspiration and practical experimentation that contributes to and intersects with the larger social movements that surround them.

Methodology

The methodologies employed for this investigation have relied in large part on standard ethnomusicological practices involving formal recorded interviews and informal

³⁰ To fully grasp the ideological challenge presented by the netlabel movement and other corollary movements in Chile, it is also helpful to further consider these in relation to the repressive politics associated with the nation’s recent history. As Geographers/Sociologists Don Mitchell and Clayton Rosati observe, “the Pinochet regime killed activist, populist culture in Chile,” seeking instead to reorganize audiences into passive, consuming constituencies (2006:145) (see also chapter II). These authors suggest that from the neoliberal perspective that dominated the dictatorship years, “participatory, less-commodified culture was [seen] as much of a threat to global capitalism as the nationalization of industry” (Ibid.). They also suggest that finding the means to maintain and express “alternative ways of imagining the world” has remained one of the central cultural endeavors (and challenges) of the embattled Socialist movement in this environment (Ibid.:147).

conversations with informants, participant and non-participant observations of relevant practices and events, musical analysis, and bibliographic and media research. Data collection took place primarily through onsite ethnographic fieldwork conducted in August 2011, from September 2012 through July 2013, and in August 2014, although I have maintained online correspondence with several contacts throughout. While the primary constituency for this study comprised dozens of artists affiliated with the three Santiago-based netlabels referenced above, I have interviewed and interacted with several additional correspondents connected to the wider netlabel scene in Santiago and elsewhere in the region. To help situate this scene in a broader context, I have also collected input from numerous individuals associated with the field of Chilean music production and distribution as a whole.³¹

In addition to this, however, a few methods set this study apart. For instance, to access the nature of composition and innovation in the netlabel context, I conducted ‘behind-the-scene’ observation sessions working with several artists in their personal home studios as they demonstrated their techniques using various software programs and analog devices. Contributing to an important first-hand, “bi-musical” (Hood 1978) perspective concerning the aesthetic and technical parameters that shape musical creation in this environment, I also honed my own abilities in composing with digital audio software by participating in a series of relevant workshops and by taking both formal and informal lessons with Chilean consultants.

³¹ This outreach included contacts affiliated with local independent commercial labels (Quemasucabeza), governmental departments (Ministry of Culture, Chilean Society for Intellectual Property Rights), music and music technology education, radio broadcasting (Radio Uno), concert organization, online commercial music distribution (Portaldisc.com), and local fan communities, among others.

To further address questions regarding collaboration, communication, and collectivism within the netlabel movement, I realized participant observations, by actively engaging in relevant online social media forums and offline social gatherings and performances. I become an active musical participant and collaborator myself, contributing remixes and other electronic compositions of my own to various netlabel compilation projects. And as the semi-official English translator for the Pueblo Nuevo netlabel since 2012, I have acquired an insider view into some of the logistical relationships that exist between netlabel administrators and the wider field of netlabel contributors.

Lastly, I have dealt with the question of ideology in the netlabel movement in part by conducting an in depth historical review of past social movements and their intersections with Chilean music history (see chapter II). I have also documented contemporary social movements and ideological debates by observing rallies, protests, relevant performances, public discussions, and memorials – oftentimes with some my consultants, who later explained their stances and their interpretations in relation to the issues raised in these contexts (see chapter III).

Chapter Summaries

While the present chapter has introduced the themes of this dissertation, along with a theoretical framework to support their analysis, Chapter Two provides historical perspective. By outlining large-scale socio-cultural trends related to what I define here as the 20th-century “read only” media paradigm, this chapter illustrates how these international trends intersected with local musical practice in Chile as an oftentimes imperialist and repressive force (Mitchell and Rosati 2006, Mattlehart 1978, Wallis and

Malm 1984). At the same time, it also highlights examples that ran against this grain, giving particular consideration to the practices that progressive artists have developed over the years to subvert mass media hegemony.

Chapter Three shifts attention to the 21st-century and to the origins of the Chilean netlabel movement, while examining its intersections with many of the same motivations and strategies associated with the historical antecedents referenced above. In situating this phenomenon within its wider contemporary social context, this chapter devotes particular attention to the arrival of the Internet and other digital technologies to Chile, along with their impact on the local music scene as a whole. It further traces the ideological commitments that attract certain artists to netlabel affiliation, while connecting these motivations to broader principles aligned with what I outline as an alternative paradigm of recorded music circulation emerging in the 21st century.

Chapter Four applies Howard Becker's art world theory to illustrate how recent advances in music production software, in tandem with the non-commercial distribution opportunities associated with the netlabel platform, have altered the ways netlabel artists conceive and realize electronic music composition in Chile and beyond. In addition, this chapter explores the practice of musical sampling as a central and near universal technique in this creative environment, and one with ideological motivations that resonate with the ideals of the netlabel movement.

Chapter Five provides an ethnographic and musicological analysis of the specific works and compositional practices of three distinguished Chilean netlabel artists, Gerardo Figueroa, José Manuel Cerda (a.k.a. El Sueño de la Casa Propia), and Mika Martini (a.k.a. Frank Benkho). While considering the varying motivations and circumstances that

have propelled these artists to participate in the movement, this chapter highlights some of the technological tools and specific creative and compositional techniques used to produce works intended for netlabel release.

Finally, Chapter Six addresses the nature of collaboration, collectivism, and social discourse within the Chilean netlabel scene, and in relation to the larger, transnational Free Culture movement supported by Creative Commons. To exemplify these transformational tendencies, this chapter analyzes the prevalence of remixing in this context, as well as the cultivation of multi-artist compilation projects, dedicated to themes of common interest and concern.

* * *

In sum, this dissertation seeks to contribute to longstanding ethnomusicological and interdisciplinary interests relating to music technology, media dissemination, and their combined influence on musical expression. It provides a rare musicological contribution to understandings concerning media fragmentation and its implications for social expression and collectivism in the Internet age, while also examining the role netlabels play in providing discursive space for “imagining” alternative ideologies (Coronil 2011, Escobar 2010). Above all, this case study of the Chilean netlabel movement highlights a broader international paradigm shift in the nature of cultural production and dissemination – one that challenges the previously hegemonic “read only” model of commercial exchange, while offering as a viable alternative the expanding share economy exemplified by the Creative Commons/Free Culture movement and its more participatory model of “read/write” content production and media engagement.

Chapter II

“This Disc Is Culture”: Mass Media Hegemony and Its Subversion in Chilean Musical Culture, 1965-2000

Behind the alternative label is the will to redeem products of the electronics industry in order to place them at the service of a cultural view of the world that inaugurates new times...

- Fernando Reyes Matta 1988:153

In the fall of 1968, amid the social and political upheaval that would ultimately deliver socialist candidate Salvador Allende to the Chilean presidency in September 1970, the Department of Culture for the Chilean Communist Youth financed the recording and distribution of an artistically inventive and politically incendiary album entitled *Por Vietnam* (For Vietnam) by the Andean-stylized musical group Quilapayún. Originally, the organization conceived the initiative as a one-off production. They hoped to sell a thousand records to fund Quilapayún's trip to Sofia, Bulgaria, where the group would represent the Chilean delegation in the International Youth Festival. However, as the initial pressings (and subsequent re-pressings) of the album quickly sold out, an enthusiastic audience for Quilapayún's militant brand of folkloric music and strident poetry revealed itself. Emboldened by the overwhelming success of this foray into the field of music production and promotion, the Communist Youth resolved to institutionalize the model used for the *Por Vietnam* project; and with this decision, *La Discoteca de Cantar Popular* (DICAP) – the semi-autonomous record label largely responsible for bringing international recognition to the neo-folkloric genre *nueva*

canción (new song) – came into being.¹ Until its violent dissolution following the military coup in 1973, this communist-run cultural endeavor made significant contributions to Latin American popular culture with the impressive quality and prolific breadth of its musical catalog (Gonzalez and Fairley 2003:709, Rodríguez 1984:78). It also provided an important means of communication that enabled groups like Quilapayún to subvert the cultural and political hegemony of a transnational, capitalist mass media infrastructure.

In theoretical terms, the emergence of the Santiago-based DICAP label represents an example of what music industry scholars Roger Wallis and Krister Malm have described as the “do-it-yourself” model of enthusiast record production, which appeared in several regions across the globe in the 1960s and 1970s (1984:110). As these authors suggest, the artists and producers behind many of these small, local enterprises often shared political views influenced by the “televised horrors” of the Vietnam War. They sought to distance themselves from large transnational corporations, which they considered to be implicated in imperialist exploitation (Ibid.). Yet beyond signaling a desire to disassociate from these interests, the public circulation of the revolutionary visual, thematic, and stylistic content contained on albums like *Por Vietnam* absolutely demanded the cultivation of an alternative means for mass dissemination. With its cover art depicting an enraged Vietcong soldier shouting in defiance with a machine gun raised overhead, a title track warning Yankee invaders that they would be broken by the “heroic people in Vietnam,” and musical tributes to Che Guevara and the International

¹ In its initial stages this record label actually used the name *Jota Jota*, a nickname used for the Chilean Communist Youth itself. However, for sake of clarity, and since the entire catalog produced by this organization is now generally associated with the latter appellation, DICAP, I use shall use this term throughout this discussion.

Communist Youth,² it is highly unlikely that any profit-driven company in Chile, or anywhere else, would have ever released the production at this time (Jara 1983:125). Indeed, even if the album promised to be a financial success, the potential threat of its revolutionary message to the strategic interests of the mainstream culture industries and their corporate affiliates far outweighed any such consideration.

What is more, to accompany the provocative thematic imagery invoked throughout *Por Vietnam*, Quilapayún employed a musical performance style that challenged the standards of an essentially imported and standardized popular music aesthetic in Chile. Expressing a deep sense of cultural nationalism, the members of Quilapayún, along with a cadre of similarly minded local musicians, incorporated Andean instrumentation and folkloric rhythms, while shunning the electrified guitars and rock beat that were commonplace for the mass mediated popular music of the era. These artists conceived their aesthetic departure as a symbolic gesture – a break from the false consciousness of consumerism and complacency reflected in the “universally” recognizable sounds of standardized commercial pop (Frith 1989:2). It is also for this reason that the creative activists involved in the production of *Por Vietnam* production inscribed the album’s cover with the phrase “ese disco es cultura [this disc is culture].” With this statement, which would adorn each subsequent release on the DICAP label, the Communist Youth implied an important distinction. DICAP produced “culture” in a mass media field considered to be devoid of “popular” culture.³ The music, art, and poetry that these productions conveyed were considered more than mere commodities engineered for

² These two themes are reflected in the songs, “Cancion funebre para el Che Guevara” (Funeral Song for Che Guevara), and, “Himno de Las Juventudes del Mundo” (Hymn of the World’s Youth).

³ “Popular” here meaning culture of the popular classes rather than cultural products solely produced for mass consumption.

mass consumption. In fact, the social convictions they invoked were thought to transcend the commercial transactions that nevertheless remained a necessary dynamic of their dissemination. These works and the slogan that united them reflected the position of the Chilean Communist Party and its affiliated artistic community, that culture, as “a mirror of the political” (Taffet 1997:94), could be mobilized as an effective “weapon” in the struggle for social, political, and economic self-determination (Jara 1984).

* * *

The sociocultural circumstances that gave rise to the DICAP label, and to similar organizations in other parts of the globe, are symptoms of a large-scale mass media paradigm that has, for the most part, dominated musical production since recording technology and mass media broadcasting first took hold of popular culture in the early 20th-century. In the broadest sense, this paradigm has been governed by a commercial sensibility marked by the commodification, centralization, and professionalization of nearly all stages of musical production and dissemination. Evolving over the past century along with the artistic content it distributed, this increasingly industrialized approach to musical culture has been shaped in large part by the technological and logistical constraints involved in the early stages of producing and marketing recorded music. These included the high cost of recording equipment and studio expertise, the logistics associated with the manufacture, transportation, and retail exchange of material products, and the relatively limited hours of programming available on broadcast radio and television, to name but a few. Yet, even as 20th-century technologies helped to further consolidate and constrict the cultural exchange of musical expression, innovations like the recordable cassette, more affordable home recording technologies, and most recently,

the MP3 digital file format and peer-to-peer file sharing have occasionally offered opportunities for progressive artistic and social crosscurrents to undermine one or all of the central tenets of the commercial music industry. For this reason, despite the significant social imbalances in play, the story of 20th-century mediated popular culture cannot be characterized entirely as a top-down phenomenon. Rather, as Stuart Hall suggests, it represents a field of struggle, between the centralized power structures and the inherently commercial rationality of the mainstream media establishment on one side, and an array of creative interests continually seeking to realize ulterior artistic and/or social motives through the subversion or circumnavigation of these circumstances on the other (1981:228).

With this chapter, I address some of the large-scale sociocultural trends associated with this 20th-century mass media paradigm, I illustrate how these trends intersected with musical and social expression in Chilean society over the last several decades, and I also consider these intersections in relation to the ideological divisions at the heart of Chilean society. I begin by briefly reviewing relevant theoretical perspectives relative to media hegemony, sociocultural countercurrents, and the combined influence of these competing motivations and pressures on musical creation. I then analyze these theoretical considerations in the context of three very distinct periods in Chilean history. First, I return to the history of the communist-run DICAP record label and its relation to the socially committed music genre *nueva canción* during the left-leaning *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity) era (1968-1973). Second, I turn to musical developments that took place during the Pinochet dictatorship that governed Chile under radically different circumstances from 1973 through 1989. Finally, I consider political and cultural

developments pertinent to Chilean musical life during the fragile re-transition to democracy that occurred throughout the 1990s. With this approach I seek to provide a historical, regional, and theoretical context for my ethnographic investigation of Chilean netlabels in the chapters that follow.

Mass Media Hegemony and the Culture Industry Model of Music Dissemination

At the outset, I should note that in discussing ‘mass media’ I refer to those technologies that allow for an expansion of social communication and/or expression from its immediate source(s) to a potentially broad and diffuse audience separated by time and/or space. According to this view, a radio transmission obviously represents a mass medium to the degree that an expansive public has *access* to the technology necessary to receive it. So, even if a large audience does not tune into any particular content broadcast, the potential that they could at any moment and in any array of distant places helps to characterize the medium’s ‘massive’ reach.⁴ I further qualify this definition by noting that, while print media, including music dissemination in the form of printed music notation, certainly represent the longest standing form of mass media communication, I am most concerned here with the mechanisms of electronic media necessary to record and transfer audible sound. As such, the historical context framing this discussion begins roughly at the turn of the 20th century, as humankind developed the technological capacity to harness electricity, thereby opening the door to a century of subsequent innovations and rapid social transformations.

⁴ The same holds true for LPs, cassettes, CDs, etc. Despite the potential ambivalence of the public to any particular form of content reproduced on these material formats, the extent to which an infrastructure exists to support and distribute them to consumers who have the technology to play them back determines the ‘mass’ reach of the medium.

In beginning to grapple with the nature of these transformations, it is important to recognize that technologies involved in all forms of mass media diffusion play a significant role in shaping the patterns of cultural exchange associated with them, since these technologies maintain a symbiotic and mutually-constitutive relationship with the social relations, economic patterns, and expressive content with which they are indelibly intertwined. However, Raymond Williams ([1974] 2002) offers an important caveat in warning against applying a strict “technological determinism.” He explains, technologies rarely, if ever, arise accidentally or independently from the social conditions in which they are situated. Therefore, rather than looking for the abstract ‘effects’ that technologies have on society, as if technologies were somehow self-generating entities transforming societies from without, Williams suggests that focus should shift to the analysis of the ways societies *use* technologies, and to the *intention* that social actors place in developing technologies to fulfill preconceived social needs. He notes, for example, that several key 19th and 20th-century technological developments, like the generation of electricity and the potential for the phonographic, radio, and televised communication it enabled, were all conceived and realized to satisfy the commercial and social demands of “a society characterized at its most general levels by a mobility and extension of the scale of organizations: forms of growth which brought with them immediate and longer-term problems of operative communication” ([1974] 2002:32).

Nonetheless, while these technologies certainly addressed some of the growing demands of society-at-large during this era, Williams makes another key observation when he states:

A need which corresponds with the priorities of the real decision-making groups will, obviously more quickly attract the investment of resources and the official

permission, approval or encouragement on which a working technology, as distinct from available technical devices, depends. (Ibid.:33)

Consequently, even as the intentions that drive technological investment and development may be directed towards solving a preconditioned societal dilemma, the manner through which these technical problems are solved often ultimately serve the vested interests of the privileged few to the potential disadvantage of the many.⁵

It must be acknowledged that technologies often do provide opportunities and/or complications beyond the purview of the preconceived purposes for which they were originally designed. One need look no further than Albert Einstein, who famously invented his technology for recording and playing back sound with the intention of developing a dictograph. He only later realized the medium's revolutionary potential to record, transfer, and commoditize musical sound (Garofalo 1999, Milner 2009, Suisman 2009:5). These initially unintended social consequences of technological development will become a central concept later in this dissertation. However, I must first direct attention to the social relations that helped to determine the development of media technologies in the 20th-century, as well as the organizational and economic patterns that have, for the most part, governed their function in many societies.

Clearly, the motivation for dominant classes to more directly impose their values and to more efficiently derive social and economic profit from them acts as a principle impetus behind their investments in media innovations, and even more so in the management of these technologies as they became firmly established in society. This reality corresponds with the social theories attributed to the Italian Marxist Antonio

⁵ As an example, Williams acknowledges that “commercial sponsorship and then supportive advertising model” which provided the revenue stream for broadcasting could have “and still could be “ just as easily have been substituted by a “socially financed system of production and distribution within which local and specific charges would be unnecessary . . . “ ([1974] 2002:39).

Gramsci, who famously held that dominant social classes maintain control over subordinate sectors of society through both direct domination, as exercised through the political apparatus of the State, and through “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (1971:12). In relation to the latter strategy, these classes maintain this acquiescence, or “social hegemony,” in large part by manipulating their privileged position in the world of production and imposing their values through all manifestations of social life (including the implementation of technologies).

With the capitalist paradigm serving as the hegemonic economic order governing industrializing nations at the turn of the 20th-century, it is not at all surprising that the technologies being developed for the mass dissemination of artistic content, and particularly music, were developed to better place art in the service of commerce and authority, and not the other way around. Following this logic, cultural industries – i.e. recording companies, broadcast networks, music publishers, etc. – coalesced to capitalize on investments in technological innovation, and these industries, in turn, helped to mold much of the mass mediated cultural experience of the 20th-century. Technologies were designed to optimally convert musical expressions into commercially viable commodities, materially exchangeable and salable.⁶ Musical exchange necessarily became increasingly centralized, as the patrons of this new era understandably sought to maintain their control over the material and intellectual fruits of their technological investments. The strict professionalization of nearly all forms of recorded music also

⁶ See Garofalo (1999), Milner (2009), and Katz (2010) for detailed histories of the evolution of recording technologies and the industries that developed around them. González (2005) also provides a general social history of the early 20th century development of recorded music in Chile.

became the means through which both of these ends were achieved in the realms of content production.

This is not to say that incredible art was not realized under, and at times despite, these circumstances. On the contrary, the consolidation of industry resources to find, develop, and promote talent often cultivated deeply resonating musical expressions that reflected and shaped the cultural experiences of several generations around the globe. Likewise, the legacy of the strictly commercial model of mass media musical exchange can be further defended on the grounds that, given the immense costs associated with developing and implementing the technologies necessary to record and distribute music in this era, the commodification of the cultural products of these technologies was the *only* conceivable means for their sustenance and further development within capitalist-oriented societies.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this equation. While channeling the mass distribution of culture to most directly serve the commercial and social motivations of dominant interests, this paradigm crowded out a sea of non-professional and socially marginalized artists from participating in the creative and discursive fields of mass media exchange. It severely limited the opportunities available for the diffusion of non-commercially-viable, experimental and avant-garde musical works. The hierarchal nature of the industries it spawned similarly served as a cultural filter, restricting provocative and counterhegemonic social expressions from effectively reaching and influencing an audience in the public sphere. Perhaps most significantly, this paradigm established a unidirectional flow of cultural production, transferring the expressions of a limited class of professional producers to a mass audience of consumers, who possessed few creative

avenues to publicly engage and contribute to the mediated culture that engulfed them. Thus, reconsidering Williams's thoughts on technology and society in light of these circumstances, it becomes evident that while media technologies may not arise independently from their social context writ large, for those marginalized segments of societies with little control over the development and implementation of technological expansion, these technologies certainly may still play a 'deterministic' role in their social and cultural experience, and potentially to their detriment.

This view is generally consonant with the influential and yet commonly challenged critique of the emerging culture industries leveled by the neo-Marxist scholars of Germany's Frankfurt School. These social theorists, whose ideas developed concurrently with those of Gramsci in the 1930s, shared the latter's interest in the processes through which cultural production serves not only to reflect – as Marx himself asserted – but also to reinforce and to impose the economic interests of the dominant stratum of society. However, the specific focus that members of the Frankfurt School placed on the role of the mass media in socializing complacency and diminishing the more progressive inclinations of artistic expression makes their contributions particularly relevant to the present discussion.

For Frankfurt scholars like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in particular, the conversion of culture into a commodity, marketable for mass consumption, tainted such expressions and limited their capacity to communicate organic expressions arising from "the true consciousness of the people" (2002). From their perspective, exposure to the same market-driven pressures that characterize all industrially produced commodities subjects the form and content of mediated, mass-produced artistic productions to the

processes of “standardization.” Through this, works must conform to strict categorization and readily consumable cultural conventions. In turn, strategies of “pseudo-individualization” merely veil this underlying reality by masking similarly structured, socially benign cultural products with a narrow façade of distinction (Adorno 1988). Also, rather than recognizing and seeking to develop strategic corrections for its compromised position as part of the evolving field of mass production, Adorno and Horkheimer lament, “[a]rt now dutifully admits to being a commodity, abjures its autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumer goods” (2002:127).

Over the years countless scholars have nuanced this cynical view of industrialized commodification and its transformative influence on musical and social expression. In theorizing how industry *produces* culture, for instance, pop music scholar Keith Negus has highlighted strategies used to create “identifiable products” and “intellectual properties” in the marketplace. He observes how industry models “shape the conditions within which genre practices and creative techniques come to be adopted” (1999:14, 24). Thus, either through cooption or coercion, in many circumstances (though certainly not all) artists may sacrifice more personally or socially authentic creative practices to conform to the logic and authority of the industry, rather than perhaps attempting the reverse - molding industry practices to the idiosyncratic needs of an artistic vision.

Similarly, popular music scholar Simon Frith points to the centralization and commercialized control of “what may be heard” through the mass media as he questions how cultural industries manipulate their control to actually construct and train audiences for the generally passive consumption of pop and rock music commodities (1981:40). As

opposed to the more active and preexisting public demands for cultural content that he observes in the spheres of jazz, folk, and classical music for instance (Ibid.:6), he argues that the recording industry attempts to artificially manufacture the same demand for pop music commodities that it presumes to satiate – a critique which resonates strongly with the views of Adorno and Horkheimer. Frith goes on to assert that the pressures of the market may also alienate recording musicians from their local communities, as their new constituencies become “defined by purchasing patterns,” rather than by more multidirectional, interpersonal relationships (Ibid.:51).

Of course, the commodification and commercialization of recorded music has influenced cultural relations at the periphery of the “capitalist world system,” as much if not more than it has at its core (Wallerstein 1990). Indeed, with their groundbreaking study *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (1984), in which Chile is cited as an important case study, Roger Wallis and Krister Malm highlight two significant points of intersection where the commercial paradigm of the transnational music industry asserted itself in smaller, less industrialized countries. First, these scholars assert that such countries represented secondary markets for the culture industries, where surplus, commonly second-rate musical productions could be aggressively promoted and sold, often to the detriment of local musical development. Second, and somewhat conversely, these regions offered “raw material for international exploit” (Ibid.), a cheap source of cultural extraction and expropriation, which directly mirrored the processes of material resource extraction taking place in these regions.

Concerning the cultural ramifications of this dual process of transnational commercial imposition and exploitation, sociologists Don Mitchell and Clayton Rosati

offer their own analysis of the “globalization of culture” and its effect in Chile, pointing to a central theoretical concept particularly related to the latter issue. These authors argue, “mass media and the standardization of commercial knowledge production liberate cultural works from their historical and geographical contexts, only to subjugate them to a system of exchange, private property, and competition-driven profit-seeking” (2006:152). Through this industrializing process, “extraordinary” cultural artifacts and practices “lose their exceptional quality” (Ibid.:153). They become beholden to the commercial logic through which they are exchanged and thus may be stripped of their own aesthetic logic and their own intrinsic means of expressive communication. Further echoing this sentiment, Armand Mattelart, who also looked to Chile to examine the ‘nature of communications practice in a dependent society,’ proclaims:

In a capitalist society every activity and every product participates in the world and logic of commodities. The very language which allows the sense of this activity and of this product - whatever they may be - to be transmitted to the public is the language of the merchant; this mercantile language is transformed into the lord and master of all languages. (1978:13)

As Mattelhart insinuates, commodification directly intersects with another key pillar of the 20th-century media paradigm – the centralization of authority and control that has commonly accompanied all forms of mass media communication. It is for this reason that media scholar Rosalind Bresnahan also observes the ideal of democratic social expression as simply “incompatible with a highly commercial, market-driven media system . . .” (Bresnahan 2003:41). Admittedly, significant logistical limitations associated with the earliest advances of electronic media necessarily curtailed the possibility of more democratic and inclusive approaches to mass communication, and these limitations

continued to exist through much of its evolution.⁷ For example, radio and television broadcast spectrums provide a finite number of frequencies, requiring someone somewhere to be responsible for choosing appropriate content to fill the limited hours of programming available. These same principles applied to the allocation of other media resources as well. Still, this notion of media centralization and control brings the concerns of Horkheimer and Adorno directly in line with Gramsci's understanding of hegemony. As Horkheimer and Adorno explain, through economic domination of the means of production and dissemination achieved through investment, ownership, and management, capitalist interests may effectively censor mass mediated content to conform to "their concept of the consumer and of themselves" (2002:97). These interests represent gatekeepers in the field of mass media cultural and social exchange. By extension, they are able to largely define the parameters of acceptable expression and debate in the public sphere. And since the public sphere represents that social environment where public opinion is discussed, challenged and eventually (at least ideally) resolved in consensus, the masters of these industries thus play an enormously disproportionate role in shaping the ideological formation of a society (Habermas [1964] 1974, Martín-Barbero 2012)

Characterizing another troubling aspect of this hegemonic grip on social communication, these limitations placed on the content and character of social life often remain hidden from plain view. As Mattelart suggests, "[p]ublic opinion, the concept of modernity, is transformed into an imaginary agent which upholds the monolithic interests of a class and allows a particular idea and a private vision to seem public" (1978:17).

⁷ Although in recalling Williams's arguments, one may question the extent to which these limitations resulted from technical necessity, social design, or some combination of the two.

When true structural alternatives are precluded from serious public debate, the public is left with the solitary view that social life can only remain as it already is. They become complacent, naturalized to the socioeconomic conditions that surround and, ostensibly, oppress them. According to Adorno, this system results in a popular culture that represents a “training course in passivity . . . affirming life as it is. Tautological tribute is paid to the socially dominant power concentrated in the industry” (1988:29).

In the decades since Adorno and Horkheimer first put forward their social critique, the scholarly understanding of both mass mediated popular culture and the nature of social hegemony has evolved considerably. Cracks in the Frankfurt perspective first began to surface in the academy as early as the 1950s with authors like David Riesman, who theorized the presence of minority groups of listeners that “adopted a more critical and questioning posture” relative to the passive majority (cited in Negus 1997:12). In the 1970s, the contributions of British scholars associated with the Birmingham School further advanced this proposal, foremost through the contributions of cultural theorist Stuart Hall. In contrast to the strictly top down model proposed by their German predecessors, these scholars held that popular culture should be understood as the result of more complex processes of negotiation and contestation between the classes. They held that cultural meaning cannot be entirely imposed through domination, and rather, that is a co-creation of the producers who encode cultural productions and the consumers who decode them, often through socially defined practices entirely of their own creation (Hall 1980). In summarizing this view and its implications for the understanding of hegemony more generally, Raymond Williams adds that social dominance, “has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” to

respond to the resistance and challenges “of pressures not at all its own” (1977:112).

From this perspective, hegemony represents a state of balance, tension, and flux – one in which the fulcrum may shift relative to the mutable powers wielded by both dominant and subordinate factions of society.

These challenges to Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique, along with others pertaining to the emergence of subcultures (Hall and Jefferson et. al. 1976, Hebdige 1979), reveal significant weaknesses in the former view, while offering compelling new insights. However, the Frankfurt position shall remain highly pertinent to the present discussion on two grounds. First, regardless of its ultimate veracity, this Marxist perspective has been, and in many ways continues to be, precisely the critique leveled by the more socialist-inclined artistic and political factions of Chilean society. It is this perception of a complacent and coopted capitalist culture industry that inspired the Communist Youth Organization in Chile and its affiliated artists to create their own means of musical production and circulation with the DICAP label; and through the years this ideological view has helped to inspire many subsequent progressive manifestations of Chilean musical culture as well. Secondly, despite the weakness of the Frankfurt School’s extremely narrow view concerning passivity in the consumption of mass culture, its view of dominance in the realm of mass media cultural production has, until quite recently, remained entirely relevant.

To be sure, it is possible for social and cultural norms, whether driven by focused social movements or more gradual societal evolution, to apply upward pressure on the cultural industries, forcing them to adjust content production to meet, and perhaps exploit, the shifting expectations and demands of consumers. In this way, Keith Negus

acknowledges that just as industry produces culture, in certain circumstances the opposite may be in effect, as “broader culture practices and formations” may produce or at least influence industry production practices as well (1999:15). But in these circumstances popular art merely trails, reflects, and at most reinforces social change. Concerning the reverse – the potential for artistic expression to actually inspire, mobilize, and drive revolutionary social change – the reliance on the means of mass communication to even reach, let alone significantly influence, the public sphere continues to present a significant restraint. While the emergence of independent labels like DICAP and other dissemination alternatives that appeared in the latter half of the 20th-century might have circumnavigated this obstacle to some extent, these alternatives provided limited resources and a narrow range of diffusion. Thus, the state of affairs remained largely the same throughout the last century – for musical artists to access the resources and technologies necessary to reach increasingly expansive audiences, they had to become increasingly entangled in and bound by the logic and motives of the capitalist industries controlling these media circuits. As a result, their artistic visions were at least potentially subject to dilution, cooption, and mixed reception.

As a final consideration of the culture industry model, a few words must also be directed to professionalization in the realm of artistic content production, which arose naturally from the commoditized and centralized character of this media paradigm and ultimately served both of these interests. Of course, ideally, the professional exemplifies the best talent that society has to offer; he or she earns a position on the stage by tapping into and embodying the expressive spirit of the public he or she serves through performance. However, from the commercial industry perspective, the professional artist

also represents a brand that helps to market and categorize the artistic commodities it distributes. This approach to cultural diffusion gives rise to a star system, with a tendency towards fostering superficial cults of personality, which, as a result, often outshine and/or transform the artistic expression itself. Moreover, while star performers may have access to the widest possible media exposure in the public sphere, their elevated social position actually creates a potentially insurmountable and alienating distance between themselves and the public at large. This distance limits artists' capacity to act as "organic intellectuals" in the sense outlined by Gramsci (1976), whereby they might actually channel through expression "the genuine consciousness" of the people. Rather, the probability increases that these professional artists' work will come to reflect the values and interests of the dominant class, of which they are likely to be or become part.

Many may rationalize this system by noting that the hierarchal and centralizing practices of professionalization exclusively deliver the highest levels of artistic exceptionalism and meaningful expression demanded by the public itself. Yet the exponential rise of non-professional and democratically-sourced content production that has emerged with the new opportunities for diffusion offered in the digital age, along with the seemingly corresponding decline of commercial content consumption in this same era (especially in popular music), seem to indicate that even with the triumphs of 20th-century mass media cultural exchange, this paradigm nevertheless neglected or obscured some deeply-rooted human social needs and desires.

Social Activism and Subversion

Despite the strong ties between music and commercialism that accompanied the proliferation of electronic mass media in the 20th-century, many artists still maintained distinct motivations for the diffusion of their musical works. Though these alternative motivations had long standing social roots that preceded the technological potential of recording sound, the struggle to find communicative space for their expression in the public sphere continued into the age of mechanical reproduction. Indeed, to fully appreciate this artistic undercurrent it is important to remember that the prolific commoditization of musical artifacts seen in the 20th-century is actually highly anomalous in the context of a wider historical view of musical evolution. The innate human need to experience, innovate, and communally participate in music making has always had ties to the formation of personal and collective identities, to communication and information gathering, to social activism and mobilization, and to spiritual and religious pursuits, among many other intrinsically non-commercial, and sometimes explicitly anti-commercial, social phenomena. In contrast, thinking of music as a more or less tangible product and property, to be individually or collectively produced, owned, and commercially exchanged, appears as a much more recent and technologically dependent invention.

Nevertheless, as industrialization drew communities into ever-larger and more interconnected networks of affiliation and affinity, the desire to likewise extend the various social potentialities of musical expression necessitated a reliance on electronic media to capture and circulate these sounds to a widening public. Also, since these media technologies were nearly exclusively designed and governed to serve the aims of

commerce and centralized authority, there surfaced a “fundamental tension between the essential creativity of the act of ‘making music’ and the commercial nature of the bulk of its production and dissemination” (Shuker 2001:7). Though commonly hidden from view, this tension helped to define the first century of evolution in the field of recorded music, as many artists and audiences struggled to negotiate an acceptable balance between the pressures imposed by the marketplace and their often conflicting aspirations to publically share and experience sincere musical meaning.

This is not to say that music only first became entangled with commerce in the context of 20th-century media circuits, or that commerce is entirely incompatible with other, essentially non-commercial motivations for making music. The relationship between music and economic markets, and with its various hierarchal tendencies and modes of professionalism, obviously extends much farther back in human history and across cultures. Furthermore, in many circumstances this bond may be mutually beneficial and healthy for the advancement of both commercial and non-commercial interests. What largely differentiates the 20th-century, however, is the degree to which the commercial impulse became a nearly all-encompassing and transformative dimension of the large-scale public exhibition of artistic works, and most especially music. For this reason, those expressions that *were* incompatible with commerce, commoditization, and hegemonic authority found themselves at a great disadvantage in terms of public consideration and debate. If not altogether excluded from mainstream media flows, these musical tendencies were at the very least subject to alteration if they did not comply with commercial formats, if their social or aesthetic character exceeded the boundaries set for acceptable content transmission, or if they violated the intellectual property right

restrictions that regulated commoditized artistic exchange, among other possible transgressions.

Still, these circumstances never entirely curtailed the activity of those seeking to use recorded music to achieve interests outside, or at times directly opposed to, those circumscribed by capitalist commercialism and socio-political hegemony. Moreover, among these 20th-century social crosscurrents two musical tendencies exhibit particular relevance as cultural antecedents to the creative and communicative practices at the heart of the present study. The first manifests itself in the work of those seeking to consciously channel the symbolic potential of music to raise class or community consciousness, to mobilize involvement in social movements, or to otherwise engage in progressive social activism – a process that may be viewed as a modern extension of a more primordial human tendency to employ music to help shape, maintain, strengthen, and expand communities and achieve collective social interests. The second arises through more experimental or innovative musical endeavors, which are more often than not driven by their own socio-political motivations, as intrepid artists seek to break through the conventions of musical style, form, and content to provoke corresponding transformations within individual and collective human psyches. As will become evident, the proliferation of these often-related musical countercurrents has necessitated not only the creation of innovative composition and production techniques, but also the cultivation of creative practices of diffusion. Before I can address the latter issue, however, some consideration must be given to the former.

Speaking first to the question of social activism, the symbolic capacity of music to blur or more starkly define certain distinctions of social inclusion and exclusion

characterizes perhaps its most forceful application in the socio-political realm. Acting in this manner, music may serve as a significant catalyst for the transformation and/or mobilization of certain understandings concerning social class or community configurations. These mobilized social configurations may, in turn, provide the leverage necessary for social and political change. A brief consideration of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's writings on the question of class and its formation may help to clarify this phenomenon. As he explains, social distinctions may be traced to the differential distribution of various forms of capital (social, economic, symbolic, cultural) that accrue within certain segments of a population (1987). The awareness of commonalities in relation to shared accumulations of capital brings shared experience, or habitus, which allows social factions to congeal through the mutual recognition and affirmation of their common position in social space. In Bourdieu's words, these populations thus more or less naturally "come together as a practical group" (Ibid.:6). However, because both the sources of capital and their categorization are socially constructed rather than objective realities, Bourdieu acknowledges that in certain circumstances this process may also be subject to manipulation. This follows as social activists, often operating in the ambiguous middle strata of society, attempt to shape the boundaries of class affiliation for political gain – a process Bourdieu describes as the "political work... of class-making" (Ibid.:8).

While the manipulators of this class-making process are often politicians or civic leaders, Simon Frith (1981) relates how musicians may play a parallel role in using their expressions to help develop a sense of class-consciousness and to inspire solidarity. In this way, musical creators and performers help mold the ambiguous boundaries between social factions by incorporating certain signs into their works that highlight one form of

capital over another (say race over economic status or vice versa). This, in turn, may help to instill particular constellations of mutual empathy, or conversely, to drive a wedge of distinction between one social group and another. Frith further recognizes how music, in addition to offering these signs of collective identity, may provide a means for the articulation of goals for common action among these social groups. And political scientist Mark Mattern (1998) shares this view as he considers music's role in helping to enable a political community to "act in concert." Mattern suggests, for instance, that, particularly in its role as a means of communication, music may help to mobilize the sense of commonality necessary for concerted social action through its use not only in defining distinctions between groups, but also by instilling a sense of common history and by expressing ideals or common purpose.

From a wider perspective, the social dynamics involved in establishing this sense of commonality, regardless of whether it is conceived as class or community, become increasingly complex and abstract as the alignment and manipulation of social groups transcends immediately local, face-to-face interaction and begins to assume increasingly extended dimensions. Yet the communicative and symbolic dimensions of musical diffusion have an important role to play at this level as well. This is true especially in light of the imaginative capacity of music to shape and spread broadly conceived notions of social union across space and through time. Following political scientist Benedict Anderson's oft-cited theory, these types of social interactions, particularly as they become reified in relation to territory in the form of the nation, constitute "imagined communities" (1983), wherein dispersed individuals simultaneously 'imagine' their inclusion in a common community with distant others who they will never meet in

person, but with whom they may nevertheless come to feel deeply connected. Moreover, while Anderson himself pointed to the diffusion of print capitalism as the necessary means through which ideas of shared identity and a shared connection to place first took root among these disparate peoples, Michelle Bigenho (2002), among others, has suggested that music may play a similar role in developing abstract and expansive feelings of ‘imagined’ belonging. An obstacle to this process lies, however, in the fact that music exists as a medium that must rely on other forms of media diffusion to amplify its message and to extend its conceptual impact on community formation beyond the strictly interpersonal relations that might be equated with live performance networks.

This brings this discussion back full circle to the basic tension of conflicting interests between socio-politically motivated musical endeavors, which aspire to help consciously reorganize the social imaginary and revolutionize the political and economic relations that come to define it, and the hegemony of capitalist-oriented media networks, which constitute and bolster the status quo. At the heart of this inherent tension is the struggle for the diffusion of symbols, and as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, “what is at stake in symbolic struggles is the imposition of the legitimate vision (through the power of the state) of the social world and of its divisions, that is to say symbolic power as worldmaking power” (1987:13).

Lastly, to relate this theoretical discussion back to the Chilean context, suffice it say that the symbolic struggle to organize the social and political landscape in this society has evolved over several decades as a deeply polemic, and at times truly perilous, contest. In this struggle, music and poetry, perhaps more than any other forms of cultural expression have been strategically employed as key symbolic resources, helping to

reshape class alliances and to project and mobilize support for opposing visions of the Chilean nation. Beyond this, it is important to consider how the underlying ideological skirmishes that unfold in this way involve not only the complexities of circulating particular artistic messages *through* the mass media, but also the hegemonic social messages conveyed *by* the modes of cultural circulation and communication themselves.⁸ Hence, for those artists seeking to advance alternate ideals, the subversion and circumnavigation of capitalist media networks commonly signifies both a means to an end and a counterhegemonic end in and of itself.

La Discoteca de Cantar Popular (DICAP), Unidad Popular (Popular Unity), and the Emergence of Nueva Canción 1965-1973

In returning to the analysis of the DICAP record label referenced in the foreword to this chapter, three key characteristics serve as particularly illustrative examples of the theoretical principles presented thus far. The first relates to DICAP's service as an alternative art world, operating apart from the mass media infrastructure dominated by transnational capitalist interests and by a complicit local bourgeoisie. Through its own newly opened channels of diffusion, this organization's cultural activity helped to foster and mobilize a progressive cultural and social movement in Chile that made a lasting impact on national politics, as well as on the broader politics of the region. The institutionalization of DICAP, itself the product of pre-existing social, political, and artistic currents that were gaining momentum through the 1960s, allowed these

⁸ Juan Pablo Gonzalez confirms this position and its relevance to popular music in the Latin American context in stating that, "the meaning of texts, in the wide sense of the term, is found not only in the texts themselves, but in the forms of production, circulation, and consumption . . ." they entail. (2013:123).

movements to more freely communicate their cultural and political ideals in the public sphere, and to extend their social impact.

Secondly, while DICAP helped to hone and convey progressive ideologies through its content, this organization's policies and modes of production also represented an expression of an important progressive ideal.⁹ This presumes that music, like all forms of culture, maintains an intrinsic value beyond its commercial exchange value, and that this value may be lessened or corrupted when subjected to the naked pressures of capitalist markets – particularly when foreign interests are involved. The social activists involved in establishing DICAP structured their model of cultural production in accordance with this discourse. As such, the organization became symbolic of the practical viability of this stance, as well as of the broader progressive ideologies that gave rise to it.

Lastly, in accordance with Howard Becker's ideas concerning the dynamics of art world transformation referenced in Chapter I, DICAP made a lasting cultural impact through its influence on the compositional aesthetics, performance practices, and social outlook of the musicians who came under its wing. With access and encouragement from a sympathetic production facility, artists experimented with new musical forms, aesthetics, and thematic content largely unimaginable in the previous order. Through this process these nascent performance practices became codified into a recognizable genre of socially committed, folkloric song, eventually known as *nueva canción chilena*.

⁹ As Brian Larkin observes, media exist as infrastructures that transmit representations through content; but like all infrastructures they are also “representational events” (2008:63). Through his analysis of various media phenomenon introduced to Nigeria through the colonial project, he conveys how these media systems, in addition to carrying the messages of colonial authority, became a representation of this power through their technological successes and failures. Likewise, in Chile DICAP helped to transmit the cultural ideals of the Communist Party through its content, while simultaneously representing the viability of these same cultural ideals through its institutional policies and through its successes.

To begin, the general impetus that initiated DICAP and its affiliated musical culture – and, for that matter, the larger leftist turn of which they were part – paralleled the tumultuous socio-political context that shaped and transformed Chilean society in the 1960s. Throughout the decade, Chile experienced steady decline in its overall economic condition. A long battle with inflation led to an erosion of salaries “at the rate of 25-30 percent a year and often more;” and, particularly within the middle sectors of society, there was a feeling that workers could no longer “afford to leave their economic interests to employers’ benevolence” (Roddick 1976:17). With 85 percent of all Chile’s export revenues coming from mineral operations owned by foreign companies, increasing support gravitated to the socialist agenda to nationalize mines in order to stop the flow of capital out of the country, as well as to sever a relationship in which the state often repressed its own workers in order to protect foreign interests (1976:1).

Many leftist activists and sympathizers traced their country’s precipitous regression to the exploitation of Chilean resources and labor by a coalition of capitalist interests, including large land holders, banking and industrial interests, foreign imperialist powers, and “most notably the United States” (Oppenheim 1999:18). However, for those who wished to challenge this socio-political order, or to vocalize opposition to the deteriorating conditions of their economic reality, there existed one major impediment. The same transnational and local bourgeoisie interests that dominated the industrial and financial sectors of the Chilean economy also maintained a clear monopoly over the mass media (Gonzalez 1976:106). Foreign commercial interests owned nearly 100% of the radio and television industry in Chile during this era (Johnson 1973:16). The American corporations EMI and RCA dominated the local recording industry, owning and

operating the only two record manufacturing facilities in the country (Wallis and Malm 1984).¹⁰ Similarly, many of the newspapers maintained (and continue to maintain) strict ties to the most conservative factions of the ruling elite.¹¹ Hence, the entanglement of transnational and local bourgeois economic interests with radio, television, print and record production meant that, for those interested in expressing a commitment to structural change, the mass media were “practically closed” (Reyes Matta 1988:153).

In the cultural sphere the implications of this scenario were stifling, particularly for local music development. Joan Jara, wife of *nueva canción* artist Victor Jara, explained that the global expansion of multi-national recording companies swamped Latin America, incorporating the region as “a secondary market which could be used as a dumping ground for the remainders of the international recording industry” (1983:79). This led to a preponderance of North American popular culture on the airwaves, in tandem with an environment in which Chilean artists, in order to achieve commercial success, had to imitate these styles.¹²

From the perspective of an increasingly radicalized Chilean leftist community, who saw in the recent Cuban Revolution an alternative paradigm for social and political organization, the ubiquitous presence of foreign cultural programming in the mass media endorsed, sustained, and naturalized the structural dependence of the Chilean economy on foreign capital and intervention. Furthermore, the media’s focus on “straight

¹⁰ The foreign control over the Chilean recording industry conforms to a pattern that Wallis and Malm observe in small countries. These countries represent small markets, which presents difficulties in maintaining or setting up local phonogram production facilities. The result is often foreign domination.

¹¹ This is true particularly for the widest circulated newspaper in the country, *El Mercurio*, which has been owned for generations by one of Chile’s largest landowning families (Corvalan 1973), and which continues to be considered as a conservative voice.

¹² This trend manifested itself most notably in the early 1960s with the Chilean pop movement called *nueva ola* (new wave). This offered an almost indistinguishable imitation of the teenage pop rock emanating from North America in the 50s and early 60s, often complete with Anglicized names and English lyrics.

consumerism” over education, health, or development provided a convenient diversion from considerations of social inequity (Johnson 1973:122). Leftist activists thus argued that the dominant media interests shaping popular culture fulfilled a definite function: “to hem in the forces which could unmask the deception of the class which exercises its control over them” (Mattelart 1978:18).

In the early to mid-1960s, in direct confrontation with this social context, a new artistic and political impulse began to take root. This movement, eventually labeled with the term “*nueva canción*,” conceived its role as one of retrieval and re-popularization of the cultural heritage of Chile, and of Latin America in general. The perceived threat of cultural and economic imperialism also played a major role in shaping the contours of its aesthetics. Indeed, as Fabio Salas suggests, “*nueva* wanted to be distinct, alternative, leftist, revolutionary... Chilean as much in reality as in the unrealized call to a new Chile, free and committed” (2003:64). As both an aesthetically symbolic gesture of resistance and as a direct medium for the communication of moral outrage, this movement became a tactical resource for leftist political interests as they attempted to “inspire a sense of class consciousness among mass workers” (Ibid.:63) and to thereby vie for control of the Chilean state.

In general, the word “new” in the title “*nueva canción*” referred both to the new interpretations of traditional styles incorporated into this music, as well as to the new cultural and political consciousness attributed to it (Tumas-Serna 1992:144). Although the name was not officially conferred on the genre until 1969,¹³ the crystallization of the creative impulses that characterize it began with the 1965 Chilean election, wherein a

¹³ This official naming of the genre came through its association with *La Primer Festival de la Nueva Canción Chilena* (The First Festival of New Chilean Song).

coalition of leftist musicians began singing folkloric songs at rallies for socialist candidate, Salvador Allende, in his first bid for the presidency.¹⁴ On the one hand, the motivation to incorporate folk traditions into the early Chilean *nueva canción* movement came from a desire to provide a meaningful “alternative music” to the foreign commercial music that was dominating the mass media at the time (Carrasco 1982b:601).

As Andrés Márquez, a member of the *nueva canción* ensemble Illapu noted:

We wanted to create a movement which would fight for the cultural decolonization of our country so that people should feel identified with their own music, and that musicians should be able to represent our people in their songs, in their melodies, and in their rhythms (1983:8).

On the other hand, the movement sought also to promote a more “authentic” national expression rooted in the folkloric traditions of the indigenous peasantry and the working classes, in stark contrast to the romanticized style of folklore favored by the elite and characterized by *nueva canción* artists as “tourist” folk (Fairley 1984:109).¹⁵ Hence, one of the greatest folkloric influences on the movement in Chile came from the styles and aesthetics associated with the indigenous Andean population, as these musical traditions

¹⁴ As one of the most notable among these singers and songwriters, Violeta Parra often receives credit as being a primary creative wellspring for this movement. Throughout her career she made several trips into the countryside of Chile to collect folk songs, which she included in her musical performance repertoire. Although rarely overtly political, Parra’s appropriation of folklore thus established a model for other songwriters in the burgeoning movement to follow (Morris 1986:119). Many disciples then added to these folkloric genres the subversive or clearly confrontational lyrical and thematic content that has come to partially define *nueva canción*. Among those influenced by her life and work, the passionate singer and composer, Victor Jara, would go on to become one of the most iconic and controversial members of the song movement, especially after Parra’s death in 1967.

¹⁵ The ensembles Los Cuatros Huasos and Los Quincheros Huasos most characteristically represent this type of folklore, which idealized the character of the huaso or cowboy. Although the repertoire of these groups included some of the same styles and folkloric dances (such as the *cueca* and the *tonada*) which were also later incorporated by *nueva canción*, the latter artists considered this music “tourist” folk because its themes “sentimentalized and idealized rural life” in Chile (Fairley 1984:109). Moreover, according to Osvaldo Rodríguez, since the genre catered to a bourgeois audience, its performers, who were also often drawn from the bourgeois class, “[d]ecided to sing of the countryside that they saw, not of the exploitation, nor the misery, nor the lack of schools and hospitals, but of the beauty of the central zone with forests and snow-peaked mountains, as seen through the eyes of the landholder” (1984:42).

reflected a distinction not only in relation to foreign cultural imperialism, but also to the dominant national culture promoted by the Chilean elite.

The revalorization of rural and indigenous traditions became particularly overt with the creation, in the mid to late 1960s, of musical ensembles like *Quilapayún*, *Inti-Illimani*, and *Cuncumén*. All took their names from the indigenous Aymara or Quechua languages in an effort to signify social solidarity between the primarily middle class student populations from which they emerged and the Chilean peasantry, who they considered to possess the most authentically Chilean cultural identity. In addition to their incorporation and cultivation of folkloric musical and lyrical structures, these groups performed on a variety of instruments linked to indigenous and *campesino* musical traditions, including the *zampoña* (pan flute), the *quena* (vertical cane flute), the *charango* (a small ten stringed instrument arranged in five courses and often made out of an armadillo shell) and the *bomba* (a large Andean drum). These artists also generally avoided the electric guitars and drum kits prominent in 1960s pop and rock music that, for them, had become emblematic of foreign imperialism and the false consciousness of escapism.

Since the new folkloric and indigenous stylized aesthetics of *nueva canción*, for the most part, fell outside the dimensions of acceptable convention, both in terms of the mass media and even for local performance venues (clubs, theatres, etc.), from its earliest beginnings the artists associated with this movement had to engage in what Fernando Reyes Matta has described as a “counter strategy of dissemination” (1989:449). In circumventing limitations regarding access to public space, *nueva canción* artists and aficionados worked to create and exploit alternative venues to present their work to

audiences. Among these, political rallies of sympathetic candidates and causes became receptive outlets for the performance of this music, as did meetings organized by student and union groups. Most importantly, *nueva canción* artists and their supporters also established a network of small performance venues called *peñas*,¹⁶ which provided an initial setting for artists to develop and share their craft in “an informal atmosphere, without the usual censorship and commercial trappings” (Jara 1983:81).¹⁷

Given this approach to dissemination, the institutionalization of DICAP represented a logical next step. This is particularly true insofar as more affordable prices had already begun to allow greater access to the technologies necessary for establishing a local music industry in general (Wallis and Malm 1993:2). Still, DICAP developed an organizational culture shaped by a strikingly different value set than that governing other independent record labels emerging in the 1960s. As a venture whose primary interests were cultural and political, its business model sought only to remain self-sufficient. This allowed the label to pay its musicians a significantly higher royalty rate than others (Gonzalez and Fairley 2003:709). The non-profit orientation and the possibility for Communist Party subsidy if needed also allowed the organization to take significant artistic risks, and to attempt to push forward an unfamiliar artistic aesthetic rather than to simply adjust production to meet an expected market demand.¹⁸

Nevertheless, even as DICAP enabled the subversion of mass media hegemony in terms of production, the organization still faced obstacles in terms of mass distribution

¹⁶ Nancy Morris describes a *peña* as “a small coffee house dedicated to folklore” (1986:120).

¹⁷ Interestingly, Gabriela Bravo and Christian González have also noted that, the *peña*’s significance extended beyond simply providing a venue for music performance. It “functioned like a workshop, like a small store of discs and artisan goods, like a cultural center for the surrounding neighborhood”; and, towards this end, it served not only to spread artistic expression but also “to spread new modalities of making art.” (2009:31)

¹⁸ In this way, DICAP distinguished itself from other commercially oriented independent labels that lacked, “the capital or the courage to risk stirring up new demand” (Frith 1981:62).

and dissemination.¹⁹ As a result, it relied on preexisting social networks in its early stages, both those associated with the artistic community and the political culture of the Communist Party and the country's unions.²⁰ Distribution took place through a mostly hand-to-hand network, as albums were sold directly at performances, union meetings, student and community organizations, etc.²¹ Following the 1970 victory of socialist president Salvador Allende, who's platform represented the political expression of the same interests, ideals, and class affiliations associated with the Chilean Communist Youth and with the music of *nueva canción*, the resources available to DICAP expanded exponentially. The organization moved from an alternative network to a more or less official appendage of the Chilean state. As Jan Fairley relates:

The RCA pressing plant, the only one in Chile, was nationalized and was soon working at full capacity rather than 50 per cent as it had been at the time of the takeover. EMI, which had a manufacturing monopoly, was not taken over, but quickly adapted to the situation, reportedly proud at being the first capitalist company to release anti-capitalist music. Records were sold at fixed price and profit was in terms of sales volume rather than profit margins. (1984:113)

Restriction on the import of foreign phonographs, quotas for national music on the radio and in concert, and the opening of local record stores to DICAP distribution also increased the accessibility of this industry's products in the Chilean public sphere (Ibid.).

Notably, as the subversion of capitalist media hegemony in the local sphere peaked, creative minds at DICAP, with Allende's support, also targetted what Mattelart

¹⁹ Little information is given regarding DICAP resources for manufacturing. However, since EMI and RCA monopolized these industries, it is assumed that, somehow, one of the facilities was used.

²⁰ It should be noted here that *nueva canción* as an artistic community and the Communist Party and as political organization were extremely integrated, with many of *nueva canción* artists directly participating in the political culture.

²¹ Although radio and television were largely closed to the genre, one notable program called *Chile Rie y Canta* (Chile laughs and sings), which was financed by labor unions and broadcast on Radio Minera, did help to popularize the genre (Mattern 1998:41). Likewise, activist radio hosts would occasionally play the material in smaller provincial stations as well (Gonzalez and Fairley 2003:709).

has described as the “internationalist” consensus of the transnational mass media (1978:23). Through the transnational distribution of DICAP’s products, the industry’s intellectuals sought to promote a Pan-Latin American socialist/communist coalition to further compete with the North Atlantic capitalist consensus dominating the international public sphere. DICAP artists and organizers encouraged musical groups, whose political commitment left them with little access to production facilities in their own countries, to travel to Chile to record and to release their material through their label.²² And in the space of just five years the DICAP label had gone from a small local industry, producing 4,000 records in its first year, to the primary national production facility for what had become, under Allende, a metropole of transnational socialism. Indeed, before Chile’s 1973 coup, the label was on track to fill a production quota of 30,000 records for that year (Wallis and Malm 1984:113).

DICAP and the Aesthetics of Nueva Canción

As Howard Becker suggests, within a given art world system, artists “work with an eye towards what existing institutions can handle” (1983:94); they conceive and realize their artistic vision within the limitations and/or opportunities for diffusion and reception present within this broader social network. And so it was with the artists affiliated with *nueva canción* as they began to adapt their musical works to exploit the new production opportunities offered by DICAP. While many, like Victor Jara, Rolando Alarcón, and Quilapayún, had released albums with other labels before DICAP opened its doors in 1968, a clear distinction appeared in their compositional and presentational style

²² The catalogue of nearly 60 records produced by DICAP during its five-year history in Chile thus includes albums by groups from Cuba, Argentina, and Russia (Rodríguez 1984:79).

as they began to release new material with the Communist label. Where lyrical references had once remained indirect and vague, with “encoded” references intended to be received and understood only by an initiated audience (Hall 1980),²³ a far more explicit and confrontational approach took its place. Likewise, the musical aesthetics explored in this new context became increasingly complex and experimental. This new sense of style expanded to include complex forms, harmonies, rhythmic structures, and orchestrations, often associated more with art music than with the popular music styles dominating the airwaves. The presence of indigenous instrumentation also became far more prevalent.²⁴

To illustrate these shifting aesthetics, I present an example from Victor Jara’s album, *Pongo en sus Abiertas Manos* (Into your Open Hands), released in 1969 as DICAP’s second production following Quilapuyún’s *Por Vietnam*. Much like Quilapayún, Jara’s lyrical and thematic style took a dramatically different tack within the new production context. In fact, according to his wife, Joan, songs like “Preguntas por Puerto Montt,” and “Te Recuerdo Amanda,” would have never passed the political censorship barrier of the mainstream culture industry (1983:125). In addition to this new

²³ These vague poetic references allowed artists to allude to political commitments, while maintaining a plausible deniability that enabled them to cross over the censorship threshold of the existing culture industry.

²⁴ Although the Andean *quena*, had been used in Chilean popular music before, it had been done so mostly as an expression of what Horkheimer and Adorno referred to as “pseudo-individualization,”— a small symbolic gesture to give a generally standardized musical product the false appearance of difference (2002). With DICAP releases these aesthetics became a central component of the musical texture. This was particularly true with the 1969 self-titled debut by Inti-Illimani, which solely utilized the folkloric and indigenous instrumentation associated with the Andean region, while including several, stylized interpretations of traditional tunes associated with Andean communities. Notably, this change in style had deeply symbolic connotations. In Chilean society, the indigenous population had come to represent the past. While the musical practices of these peoples were occasionally celebrated by Chilean society or within mainstream culture, it was always in “historical” sense, representing the national “roots” of a country progressing towards modernity (Nandorfy 2002). With Inti-Illimani’s aesthetic gesture, they directly challenged this view, heralding the marginalized indigenous population as a vibrant element of the country’s present. The symbolically marginalized status of this population also provided a convenient counter-hegemonic identity for *nueva canción* artists like Inti-Illimani and their Communist Youth supporters at DICAP to adopt, as they challenged the legitimacy of transnational capitalism and the Chilean state.

approach to communication, however, a brief analysis of another song included on the album, “‘Movil’ Oil Special,” demonstrates his similarly broadening musical horizons.

To begin, the title “‘Movil’ Oil Special,” suggests a play-on-words, juxtaposing a reference to Mobil Oil (a foreign capitalist presence in Chile) with a reference to the mobile (‘*móvil*’) riot squads sent to crackdown on protests and social unrest (Jara 1983:119). At its heart, the song is a celebration of the student protest movement that was heating up at the time. As such, the title creatively references both the cause for this protest (anti-imperialism) and a potential threat to it (security forces), while drawing a link of association between the two.

The track begins in the style of what may best be described as the head section of a Cuban *son*, though it is notably presented here without its characteristic *clave* ostinato. After a short introduction based around a typical *son guajeo* arpeggiation on guitar, the song proceeds through its first verse and its only refrain. This ‘head’ section presents is notable in two respects. First, the *son* itself, as an icon of Cuban musical culture, had become for many *nueva canción* artists a symbol of this nation’s successful revolution, and by extension of communist revolution in general. Secondly, the initial verse and refrain structure sets up an interesting dichotomy, as they seem to represent the students and security forces respectively. The verse, realized in common time and embellished with various shouts and whistles, is accompanied by a chorus singing “Forward workers and students.” It then joyfully and confidently concludes with the declaration, “In this beautiful garden of yuppies and dinosaurs, the revolutionary youth have finally said ‘enough.’ ‘Enough’!”

With the refrain the tempo changes to a swift 2/4 and the harmony shifts to the dominant. The melody also gains tension as the staccato lyrics note the arrival of the armored vehicles, followed by the riot police with their tear gas. A background vocal part repeats “Movil oil special” deep in the bass and the section reaches its apex with the derisive words, “Ay these vigilantes are such a drag.”²⁵ Following this refrain the song breaks with the *son* at 1:11, illustrating the first of its genre bending characteristics. Again changing back to a dramatically slower 4/4 tempo, the song presents a subdominant-centered bridge based around a reassuringly legato melody with the accompanying affirmation, “We are the reformers, the revolutionaries, the anti-imperialists of the University.” At this point (1:34), the song pauses, a background participant shouts “March!” and, following a short martial melody ironically hummed in unison, the song proceeds to its most unusual feature: a 40 second long interpolation of audio recordings capturing a confrontation between students and the police, complete with the University of Chile chant (“Chi-Chi-Chi-Le-Le-Le”) and the sounds of water cannons and tear gas launchers. The song ends with a return to the original *son* verse, but, significantly without the refrain. Despite the confrontation, the students in the song have reasserted their convictions, symbolically triumphing over their challengers.

Significantly, if not for the alternative opportunities offered by DICAP, the experimentation exhibited in “‘Movil’ Oil Special” would have found little support within the traditional music industry in Chile, even without its revolutionary thematic imagery. Indeed, one must bear in mind that even as similar experiments with the disorientation of musical form and the incorporation of *concrète* audio were taking place

²⁵ The slang terms used in the lyrics are *guanaco* for the vehicles – a reference to the llama, as the water cannons on the armored vehicles ‘spit’ at the protesters; and *paco* for the police – a derogatory usage.

within the commercial popular music world in Europe and the United States at this time, those creating music on the margins of the transnational capitalist system did not generally enjoy the same creative license afforded to the likes of the Beatles and other top performers. Nonetheless, the inclination to innovate still connected Jara to the more forward looking musical trends emerging from the United States and England in the 1960s, as did his willingness to be understood not only as a popular musician but also as ‘an artist’ (Salas 2003:73).

While Jara’s “‘Movil’ Oil Special” reflects the transformation of musical form at the micro level of song, another example, Quilapayún’s 1970 release *La Cantata de Santa Maria de Iquique*, exhibits a willingness to boldly engage much larger forms as well. Written by classical composer Luis Advis, this work represents a cantata orchestrated for folkloric instruments and strings, and one particularly conceived with Quilapayún in mind as the performers. The theme addresses the 1907 massacre of 2800 striking miners at the Santa Maria school in the northern city of Iquique, and as scholar and Quilapayún member Eduardo Carrasco relates, this topic “responded perfectly to political and cultural moment taking place in Chile and in Latin America” (1995:84). The work’s form, which encompasses an entire LP, generally adheres to the conventions of the Baroque cantata with its inclusion of a prelude, arias, and musical interludes, although short stories were substituted for recitatives.

Considered by many to be the apogee of the *nueva canción* movement, the *Cantata* inspires a few relevant observations. First, it exhibits the fading genre distinctions taking place within the context of DICAP’s production network, wherein art music composers like Advis found an avenue to reach a wider audience, and more

popularly-oriented artists like Quilapayún found the support to conversely seek greater sophistication in their work.²⁶ Second, it has sold quite well over the years (Ibid.), illustrating the fact that mass audiences, when given the proper opportunity, can and will accept challenging works. And third, like Jara's "'Movil' Oil Special" and countless other examples from DICAP's catalog, this work illustrates how artistic experimentation commonly accompanied and, indeed, often enhanced political commitments to educate, incite, and mobilize the public citizenry.

As a final point of consideration, in addition to offering new creative opportunities, DICAP institutionalized new creative conventions and restraints that helped to codify *nueva canción* into a recognizable genre. On the one hand, these stylistic and thematic conventions and commonalities provided the movement with a collective identity that ultimately served its larger ends.²⁷ On the other, the overt political and ideological motivations for the DICAP project also meant that artists had to balance certain aesthetic inclinations with the political commitment of the label and its backers. Fernando Reyes Matta asserts, for instance, that, "From the aesthetic point of view," this ideological push from DICAP, often left artists in the tricky position of walking "the razor's edge between poetry and pamphlet" (1988:450). Indeed, some *nueva canción*

²⁶ A similar transcendence of art world boundaries will be shown in relation to the opportunities of contemporary netlabel distribution as well.

²⁷ For example, the same two brothers, Vicente and Antonio Larrera, designed nearly all the cover art for DICAP's LPs. Employing a variety of artistic techniques, from silkscreen printing to illustrations, superimpositions, and graphic collages, this work nevertheless helped "to give an identity and unity to the phonographic offerings," and one that made them more recognizable in the marketplace, while also symbolically connecting each individual release to a larger body work and an even larger cultural and political movement (Salas 2003:81).²⁷ Similarly, Fabio Salas speaks of the "DICAP sound," which he describes as, "a palpable demonstration of what could be recorded in Chile with cheap resources, when supplemented with careful engineers characterized by wisdom and know how" (Ibid.:82). He goes on to note, "thanks to the work of studio engineers like Frank Benkho and Ángel Araos, the DICAP discs were in many cases a wonder of sonic resolution, that further realized the identity of the label" (Ibid.).

artists have suggested that, during the DICAP era, creative conviction did become subservient to ideology.²⁸

After five successful years subverting the entrenched hegemony of the Chilean and international mass media, DICAP's dissolution came in 1973 with the coup d'état that ousted Allende and installed a military junta led by General Augusto Pinochet. In the immediate aftermath of this violent overthrow, which resulted in the death of both Allende and Victor Jara, tens of thousands of suspected leftists were detained, hundreds were killed or disappeared, and those who managed to escape this assault were forced into exile.²⁹ The junta's security forces ransacked and burned DICAP's recording and storage facilities, destroying all of the masters of its music – at least those that had not been hidden by artists and activists in preparation for what was predicted by many to be an imminent take-over (Jara 1983). Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the same transnational and local media interests that had been brushed aside under Allende helped to fund and orchestrate the successful coup, with political and tactical aid from the United States government (Corvalan 1979:17,49). Despite this setback, however, the ideological stance towards cultural production championed by DICAP has maintained a lasting impact on Chilean cultural discourse, offering a stubbornly dissenting counterpart to the neoliberal approach firmly instituted in the wake of the coup.

²⁸ For one, *nueva canción* artist Patricio Manns acknowledges: “Look, with respect to the *nueva canción* I believe that the problem is the following: you can't write for a determined objective. This would be like placing a straight jacket on artistic creation... [After Allende's election] [c]omposers began to write songs for the process, they forgot that their songs had been critical, many things of scarce quality were made, and a large majority of the people rejected them” (Cited in Osorio 1996:195).

²⁹ This included almost all of the *nueva canción* movement's most prominent artists.

Musical Dissemination Under Dictatorship (1973-1989): *Alerce* and Clandestine Cassette Distribution

Art is a product that should be sold, not given. Why would someone pay for shoes and not for a Beethoven Sonata?

- César Sepúlveda – Vice President of Grupo BHC
(Cited in Bravo and Gonzalez 2009:52)

The Pinochet dictatorship transformed the Chilean media landscape and its corresponding public sphere completely. With this transformation, the dissemination and creative strategies used to musically assert the ideals and the sense of community associated with Chilean left had to adapt to new circumstances. This was true also for the often-related impetus to cultivate non-commercial and/or more democratic avenues for musical engagement with the public sphere. In this section, I examine musical expression and dissemination under dictatorship in Chile with two overarching goals. First, I highlight the media policies instituted during this era, the subdued but continuing presence of the Chilean left, and the continuing social discourse advocating non-commercial music circulation networks as a cultural necessity. Second, I consider the media technology shifts that also took place during this time, especially as they relate to the appearance of the recordable audiocassette tape. This development is significant insofar as it opened a gap in the regime's control over media diffusion, leading to the proliferation of piracy and to the emergence of a clandestine network of distribution. This is also significant insofar as it presages similar social and technological transformations associated with the modern netlabel movement considered below.

As a point of departure, in his own analysis of musical life in the wake of the 1973 coup, Fabio Salas has pointed to three “ideological determinants” that characterized the Pinochet dictatorship. These include: national security and the notion of a country in a

permanent state of war with a revolutionary Marxist threat embedded in its midst; nationalism, particularly in contrast to the discourse of *bolivariana*, or Pan-Latin Americanism, advanced by Allende; and economic liberalism, as envisioned by Pinochet's team of University of Chicago trained economists (The Chicago Boys) and vigorously instituted in nearly every facet of Chilean society during this era (2003:104).

In terms of defining this regime's policy towards the production and dissemination of national music, the first and the third of Salas's determinants are particularly relevant. The discourse of national security justified the strict censorship of the mass media, making it nearly impossible for any critical or vaguely leftist cultural expression to find its way to the public sphere. Similarly, neoliberal economic policies represented the turning away from the democratization and de-commercialization of cultural activity and the return to the dominant paradigm of centralized control and profit-driven interests in the music industry. Ironically, nationalism, though firmly asserted in the sphere of political rhetoric,³⁰ had little impact on cultural policy, except as represented by the return of the most conservative and bourgeois Chilean traditions to their previously exalted position in state-sanctioned ceremonies and events.³¹ Instead, Pinochet's policies indirectly favored the re-imposition of foreign musical influence on the country and directly disadvantaged the industrial production and live performance of almost all forms of national music.³²

³⁰ For instance, Pinochet's nationalist conceit led to renewed tensions with all of Chile's immediate neighbors in the region, including near war over a border dispute with Argentina in 1978.

³¹ This was exemplified in Pinochet's move to install Los Quincheros Huasos as the official "ambassadors" of Chilean music (Rodriguez 1984:103). See also Rojas (2009) for a discussion of Pinochet's official use of the national dance, *la cueca*.

³² Beyond its media policies, Chilean regime's decision to institute a 22% percent tax on performances, which only applied to national performers, along with the imposition of curfew laws, essentially put an end to the national music performance circuit as well (Salas 2003)

Concerning censorship, the crackdown on media dissemination in Chile came swiftly and forcefully in the first several months following the coup. In this period, which also saw the dissolution of all political activity, Chile experienced a complete “blackout” in relation to the dissemination of national culture on the airwaves (Bianchi cited in Morris 1983:125). The new regime expropriated dozens of private radio stations that had been aligned with Allende’s regime and passed them into the hands of the state or favorable parties in the private sector (Brunner cited in Bravo and Gonzalez 2009:42). It also warned “... the press, the radios, and television channels, that any information given to the public and not confirmed by the Junta of the Military Government will determine the immediate intervention of the information source by the Armed Forces (Ibid.).³³ Although it appears the regime never explicitly banned by public decree the music of *nueva canción* or the Andean instrumentation typically associated with it (Jordan 2009:82), a 1974 announcement concerning cultural policy did declare, “the State must safeguard the nation from damaging external and Marxist influences” (Salas 2003:106). Since all parties in Chile had come to understand the aesthetics and the personalities associated with *nueva canción* as indexical symbols of Unidad Popular and of Marxism in general, the threat reflected in this prohibition provoked sufficient self-censorship, both in private and public life, to effectively eliminate these influences from the public sphere for several years (Jordan 2009:86, Morris 1983:125). On a more concrete level, the regime also created a directorate of social communication (DINARCOS), “charged with censoring, reprimanding, and sanctioning any shadow of political dissent in the Chilean communicational space” (Salas 2003:107). These officials circulated and enforced blacklists of prohibited performers and repertoire given to radio and TV

³³ Bravo and Gonzalez cite this passage from the “Proclamation #12” published on 9-13-1973.

broadcasters and retail outlets (Godoy 1996:137). In the realm of “high culture,” the more vanguard tendencies put forward in the years before the coup, as well as those which sought to draw connections with popular art, were also “firmly rejected” in the new order, with favor placed instead on European opera and 19th century Romanticism (Bravo and Gonzalez 2009:51).

Beyond the junta’s policies and practices regarding what cultural expressions could or could not be circulated through the public sphere, the regime’s philosophies regarding the nature of cultural production and circulation itself also signaled a significant shift. Thus, in direct contrast to a long tradition of state intervention and subsidy for national cultural production and diversity in Chile (Navarro 2006:16), and also in contrast to the educative, politicized, and more democratically-produced cultural practices that had flourished in the 60s and early 70s, dictatorship brought with it a hard re-imposition of the neoliberal ideal of culture as economic industry.³⁴ Indeed, Fabio Salas points to two key elements of this transition. He notes how the regime, “conceived culture as merchandise, to be moved and sold, without subsidy, and with a maximization of earnings,” and also, how it promoted “the expansion of messages emanated through mass media that annulled the previous hegemony and imposed a recreational vision – spectacle, entertainment, and the banalization of the public sphere” (2003:105). Just as progressives had seen a possibility for symbolizing and advancing their ideologies, not only in the messages encoded within their cultural content but also in the manner through which those cultural expressions were produced, shared, and consumed, the dictatorship

³⁴ On this point Valerio Fuenzalida notes, “Before 1973 and almost for a half a century, Chile lived under a predominant political conception that assigned a dynamic role to the intervention of the State in public life. In the specific environment of cultural life, the state dynamic, directed itself to assuring the liberty of expression and pluralism, cultural equality, and the protection of national production” (1985:9).

recognized this potential as well. As Mitchell and Rosati explain, “[p]articipatory, less-commodified culture was a much of a threat to global capitalism as the nationalization of industry,” and this threat motivated the Pinochet regime’s attempts to eliminate activist, populist culture in Chile and to replace it with “a passive consuming one” (1995:145).

As a measure of this stance’s impact on cultural production, Valerio Fuenzalida’s 1985 study on the Chilean record industry paints a dismal picture. He observed that while this industry produced 6.3 million records in 1972, by 1980 the number had dropped to 968,000 (1985:6). A few years later the numbers had dipped so low that the pressing of discs in Chile stopped altogether, as factories were dismantled and repurposed (Ibid.:13). Fuenzalida’s figures also suggest that while Chilean musical creation was participating at around 70% of the national market in 1970, by the 1980s this figure fell to between 30 and 10% (Ibid.:7). The fact that Chilean music registered at all at this point was likely due in large part to top-level Chilean artists like Illapu and the Andean-inspired progressive rock group Los Jaivas, who found industry support outside of the country, particularly in France.³⁵ Furthermore, this imbalance appeared not only in relation to production but also broadcast dissemination, as reflected in 1980 figures released by Chile’s performing rights organization, El Departamento del Derecho de Autor, which, in this year, delivered \$800,000 in royalties to foreign composers and only \$16,000 within the country (Nano Acevedo cited in Fuenzalida 1987:19).

These statistics indicate that Pinochet’s neoliberal transition, while stripping the country of any form of protectionism or subsidy, imposed a set of market circumstances

³⁵ Fernando Rios (2008) has chronicled how South American music and particularly the sounds of *nueva canción* had resonated with a wave of anti-American sentiment generated in the country in the wake of the Vietnam War. This country also gave refuge to several exiled *nueva canción* artists during the dictatorship, including Quilapayún and Isabel Parra, among others.

wherein local cultural industries (and local industry in general) simply could not compete. On the one hand, this policy helped to minimize the potential political threat of an activist cultural resurgence. Yet, on the other, it led to a culture of dependency that minimized the potential for self-determination in public expression and debate and granted foreign corporate interests (to which Pinochet remained allied) overwhelming power in shaping local aesthetics, identities, and ideologies (Mitchell and Rosati 2006:145).

As control over cultural circulation in the Chilean public sphere returned firmly to the hands of authoritarian and corporate interests, adherents to the socialist ideological vision searched for new cultural and logistical strategies to nurture their ideals, as well as the sense of cohesion and continuity that bound their politically-imagined community. Although in the first few years after the coup the terror campaign conducted by Pinochet's secret police force pressed leftist cultural and political activity into a state of near complete submission and dormancy, in time, internal and external pressures on the dictatorship gradually eased the human rights abuses on the citizenry, and this produced a relative opening for public expression and dissent.³⁶ However, throughout the entire dictatorship period the expression of socio-politically committed musical gestures demanded a delicately tempered approach that always required some measure of obfuscation – either through the cultivation of clandestine meanings when associated with public circulation and performance, or conversely, by fostering clandestine channels of diffusion for the distribution of more openly confrontational content (Jordan 2009).

³⁶ These forces organized under the name *Dirreción de Inteligencia Nacional* (DINA) and later as Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) and responsible for the death and disappearance of thousands of Chileans, and the imprisonment and torture of tens of thousands, suspected of leftist activities sympathies (Stern 2010).

A significant example of the former of these two tactics came in 1976, as radio disc jockey and music promoter, Ricardo Garcia, who nearly a decade before helped to popularize *nueva canción*, started a new cultural initiative with the expressed purpose of "rescuing the dispersed values" of the previous era (Morris 1983:124, Fuenzalida 1987:). This initiative began with the release of an LP of singer songwriter and *nueva canción* progenitor Violeta Parra's *decimas*, after a long period in which her music had been silenced, and in a social climate in which this act still represented a dangerous challenge to the regime's implicit cultural taboos. It eventually grew into the independent record label known as Alerce. For several years, this label would offer the only alternative means of musical diffusion for those seeking to express even the slightest allusion to the ideals and aesthetics of the left, and for whom any association with mainstream media outlets had come to represent not only artistic compromise but also political complicity with dictatorship and transnational capitalist incursion. As Garcia himself recounted:

The experience living with the mass media and the deeply felt need to not permit the erasure of what some call 'the memory of *el pueblo*,' the urgency of rescuing important cultural values and the need to maintain creative activity, these motivated in large part the birth of the label Alerce. (Cited in Fuenzalida 1987:69)

Interestingly, the label symbolized its stance in relation to its social context under dictatorship both with its name, a reference to a tree from the Southern Chilean island of Chiloé known for its resilience in the face of harsh climates, and with its logo (see Fig. 2.1), a depiction of two trees, one fallen and one growing, which served to traditionalize the organization as the rebirth of the popular song movement silenced with the 1973 coup (Garcia cited in Osorio 1996:52).



Fig. 2.1: Alerce logo

Much like the DICAP label that came before it, Garcia and his artistic director Carlos Necochea organized Alerce first and foremost as a cultural, and by extension political, endeavor, to help maintain a sense of community and solidarity on the left, and to help keep its ideals and aesthetics at least marginally present in the Chilean public sphere. Commercial considerations, though necessary to recoup costs and maintain the subsistence of the organization, were subservient to these objectives. As Garcia asserts:

In this moment, Alerce planted itself not as a commercial company, but simply as an instrument to register artistic-cultural acts that intuitively we felt were necessary to conserve as testimony and at the same time to distribute. Fundamentally, we were seeing the disc as a medium of mass communication, the only alternative in front of the other media that were totally closed for all expression that tried to affirm a degree of different values to the official proposal. (Cited in Fuenzalida 1987:70)

Rather than considering recorded music as a commodity, Garcia considered Alerce's albums as "symbols," and as a means of communication with far reaching impact (Osario 1996:iv). As such, he seems to have appreciated (rather than condemned) the amplification of this message beyond the point of sale, both through the hand-to-hand sharing of the discs, and more significantly, through their "infinite" reproduction on pirated audiocassettes (Ibid.:51).

³⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.selloalerce.com/> 10/6/2014. The slogan reads Alerce, "the other music."

This ideological stance led the label's directors to make creative decisions that would be considered anathema in a more profit-oriented industrial context. Garcia noted, for instance, that the criteria for release through Alerce was based strictly on quality, which he acknowledged, did not always translate to profitability. The label thus implemented two lines of production, one for the label's cultural contributions and another intended for more traditional mass appeal, with the proceeds of the latter subsidizing the former (Ibid.:52). As the director maintained, "we were hard-headed and weren't going to abandon our principle objective, which was culture" (Ibid.).

Considering the socio-political environment, particularly in its earliest days, this cultural project did not proceed without significant risk both to its organizers and to its affiliated artists. Constant threats leveled by the Ministry of Culture, combined with the regime's continuously shifting and ambiguous criteria for prohibition, plagued the organization (Osario 1996:239). Furthermore, the social atmosphere influenced the conception of works released through Alerce, as well as the contexts in which they were received and interpreted.

Amid these vague cultural prohibitions, the label's first release represented a play on symbolic relations. On the one hand, Violeta Parra had died before the most confrontational years of Unidad Popular era, thus sparing her work and her persona from direct association with this regime and its cultural output. This gave Alerce the necessarily plausible guise of neutrality when re-releasing some of her most politically benign works. On the other hand, the fact that Parra was a known communist, who had composed many other socio-politically critical works and who had campaigned for

Allende in 1965, allowed her entire body of work to be interpreted as a subversive expression of solidarity with the left and with leftist principles in general.

Similarly creative techniques that allowed artists to “say without saying” (Acevedo cited in Jordan 2009:94) and to symbolically express their solidarity with the ideals and community of the Left without raising the ire of censors or security forces became the hallmark of the musical expressions released by Alerce. These creative techniques also eventually coalesced into their own recognizable genre, known as *canto nuevo*.³⁸ This musical movement slowly reintroduced the folkloric aesthetics and instrumentation previously associated with *nueva canción*, and in so doing, affiliated artists attempted to traditionalize their activity as a continuation of the preceding movement. In contrast to this former movement, however, they avoided any explicit political references, instead opting for oblique metaphors and complex symbolic associations. With full awareness of the complications attached to the larger Chilean art world at the time, *nuevo canto* artists attempted to cultivate a new symbolic language, elusive enough to bypass censorship restrictions, yet still decipherable to politically sympathetic audiences with shared experiences and aspirations (Ibid., Salas 2003:143).³⁹

As with *nueva canción*, an in depth consideration of the artists and styles associated with *canto nuevo* lies beyond the purview of this discussion. However, one example may help to illustrate its place in the aesthetic development of Chilean music (see Morris 1983, Díaz-Inostroza 2007). The group Santiago del Nuevo Extremo, one of

³⁸ This term, which like the Alerce logo illustrated a subtle association with *nueva canción*, first surfaced as the name of a radio program hosted by García and then as a 1976 compilation LP released by Alerce.

³⁹ In this way, these creative techniques conformed to James C. Scott's notion of “the hidden transcript,” which he explains as the “offstage” discourse shared among subaltern citizens beyond the public transcript discourse circulating openly in the presence of dominating influences. For *canto nuevo*, this hidden, offstage context took shape in the interpretative frame of the initiated listener, and also in the creative mentality that composed and performed music with this interpretative frame firmly in mind.

the most noteworthy acts associated with *canto nuevo* and Alerce, established a strong connection to the aesthetics of *nueva canción* while attempting to take this aesthetic sensibility in new directions. Their 1983 song “Hasta Encontrarnos (Until We Meet),” released on an album with the same name, reflects the general style cultivated in the larger musical movement of this era. Although released as censorship restrictions were already beginning to unravel, the song’s text still relishes in poetic ambiguity. The longing for reunion addressed in its obtuse verses suggests a yearning for romantic love. Given the context, however, this sentiment could just as easily suggest longing for reencounter with exiled friends and family, or even the desire for a renewed sense of political solidarity and mobilization. With its closing line, “Until we meet on the Alameda, together again, and full of stars (hope),” the song offers no explicit clarification. However, those on the left opted for the more politicized interpretation, particularly since La Alameda (the central avenue running through Santiago) has always been the primary gathering place for the city’s political protest marches.

The song’s musical sensibility further reinforces this interpretation. Following a brief solo guitar introduction, with a tone and tempo that recall the work of Victor Jara, the song breaks into a verse accompaniment pattern that contrasts a 6/8 *charango* strumming pattern, with the 4/4 pulse of the drums and bass. This *sesquillera*-esque rhythm evokes *nueva canción*’s conception of the ‘Andean sound.’ Moreover, Santiago del Nuevo Extremo’s multipart close vocal harmony is similarly reminiscent of the vocal styles of Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún. These musical techniques synchronize the interpretative frame of the listener with the memory of these politicized styles and results in a particular reading of the text. It is worth noting, however, that while *canto nuevo*

drew from the stylistic well of its predecessor, the uncertain creative environment surrounding Alerce also provided a context for the evolution of these styles. As such, Santiago del Nuevo Extremo include a drum kit and the electric bass, as well as the general impulse towards fusion with both jazz and rock reflected in the song's contrasting 4/4 bridge and in the virtuosic transverse flute solos inserted throughout.⁴⁰

* * *

Paralleling many of the general impulses behind the appearance of Alerce, in the late 1970s, the arrival of a new media technology provided an opportunity for the cultivation of an even more autonomous, participatory, and non-commercial cultural phenomenon, albeit one that perhaps had less overall resonance in the Chilean public sphere. The recordable audiocassette, along with the equipment necessary for its playback, presented an affordable and simple means of musical circulation that decentered the traditional culture industry's control over the processes of cultural exchange.⁴¹ As an indication of the degree to which these technologies impacted the Chilean market and the social sphere in general, Valerio Fuenzalida's statistics demonstrate how the proceeds connected to the importation of blank tapes alone in 1981 reached 6 million dollars, thus surpassing the sales associated with the entire Chilean record industry this year (1985:14). Mark Mattern also states that by 1987 80% of Chilean homes owned a cassette radio, while 40% owned a cassette-recorder (1998:60).

As a result of the overwhelming presence of this new media technology, both the Chilean

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Santiago del Nuevo Extremo's incorporation of the transverse flute seems to allude to the *quena* and *zampoña* sounds of *nueva canción*, while simultaneously offering an example of musical evolution.

⁴¹ Interestingly, ethnomusicology Peter Manuel, who conducted a study of "cassette culture" in Northern India in this same era, has observed that, "the only significant alternative to [elite control over the mass media] may be the spread of various forms of inexpensive, grassroots-based micro-media, which provide dominated social groups with an unprecedented degree of access to, representation in, and control of mass media" (1993:3).

recording industry and the market for foreign music in Chile further deteriorated in the 1980s.

The irony of this situation was that the corporate industries, whose cultural content production would eventually suffer from the use of these technologies in piracy and other non-commercial forms of musical exchange, were, in many cases, the same industries developing and marketing these technologies in the first place. Of course, the same scenario would play out again nearly two decades later with the introduction of digital audio technologies. These cycles of technological innovation and exploitation thus illustrate how competition within the culture industry, as well as unforeseen social practices associated with the use of new technologies produced by these industries, may, as Simon Frith suggests, open gaps in “existing market control” and provide opportunity for more subversive and autonomous cultural activity (1981:89).

As a small, portable, reproducible, and adaptable media format, the audiocassette afforded precisely this type of opportunity under dictatorship in Chile. While offering a means for the clandestine circulation of cultural content strictly forbidden under Pinochet’s policies of cultural censorship, it also provided a channel for more participatory and non-professional cultural activity. This technology undermined the centralized control of the commercial media paradigm and established the conditions for a whole new set of innovative musical practices. As with DICAP and with Alerce, the cultural productions created in this environment also acquired social meaning as much through the nature of their content as by the means through which they circulated in society.

Offering a compelling analysis of music and “*clandestinidad*” during this era, Chilean sociologist Laura Jordán provides the most comprehensive study dedicated to this subject (2009). Her investigation considers the concept – which might best be conceived in English as the intent to both conceal and subvert – in relation to three distinct but interrelated angles pertaining to musical expression and cassette distribution. First, she examines musical practice under dictatorship as both the response to and a reflection of a general inclination towards secrecy and obfuscation in the Chilean public sphere. This tendency arose as much from the leftist factions forced to hide their political values and dissenting commitments for fear of imprisonment, torture, and death, as from the regime itself, which instilled these feelings of social anxiety and self-censorship by obscuring its own extra-legal policies of political suppression.

Next, Jordán analyzes the “transience” between the public and private spheres in this context, wherein, “an ambiguous circulation between the two spheres characterized the musical activity of the resistance” (2009:80). In this way, she recognizes a spectrum connecting the discursive qualities of the music to the relative openness or concealment reflected in the intended channel of diffusion. Hence, while the more openly circulated works, like those produced by Alerce, cultivated hidden meanings, those works that expressed political commitment in more explicit or militant terms circulated in more clandestine channels, like those supported by cassette distribution.

The third and most relevant aspect of Jordán’s argument to the larger themes of this dissertation comes with her consideration of the way cassette technology offered not only a necessary channel of diffusion, but how it also transformed the technical, aesthetic, and social nature of the musical cultural associated with it. As she explains:

Certainly, from my point of view, the power to manage the contents of the cassette is one of the most prominent qualities of this device, which, moreover, connects deeply with the needs of the resistance. The opacity of the film favored the concealment of subversive texts, it allowed the recording of several "layers" of sound, the mixture of different repertoires and the ability to camouflage messages between the music. This, coupled with its small size and portability of tape from one box to another, worked with the instrumental use of this media. A notable consequence of the massification of the cassette is to weaken the concept of the *original*, because each copy becomes unique. (2009:96)

Generally speaking, the recordable audiocassette allowed the average consumer to meaningfully participate in the production of socially circulated cultural content for the first time in history. In the Chilean context, however, this ability to creatively manipulate the order and selection of the repertoire on a cassette, combined with the possibility to include one's own recordings of the collective repertoire or even one's own compositions, allowed non-professional participants to more directly engage with, and by extension feel more directly connected to, the larger socio-political movement. This cultural content, created in anonymity and obscurity, generated a much-needed sense of collectivism or imagined community, and the circuits through which it traveled helped to establish an alternative public sphere. Furthermore, the challenge to both the regime and transnational capitalism as a whole found its expression as much in the actual content produced on these cassettes as in the act of recording this repertoire onto cassette and/or passing it from one person to the next. In fact, Jordán acknowledges that the latter phenomenon actually had a significant impact on the interpretation of the content itself:

Sneaking in danger, with limited time and resources, these recordings hold the footsteps of the situation that frames them. What the recording industry would rank as "defect," is a seal of marginal status for these cassettes. (Ibid.)

In this way, and not entirely unlike what occurred with the early punk movement in the U.S and Britain, the rough edges associated with 'underground' production became a

cherished aesthetic and a meaningful contrast to the antiseptically polished sounds associated with heavily commercialized productions.

As will be shown in the following chapters, the cassette culture of the 1980s, much more than either DICAP or Alerce, represents a direct antecedent to the social practice of music circulation found in the modern netlabel movement. This is true not so much in terms of political militancy, though certain manifestations of the netlabel movement do contain echoes of this commitment, but rather in its tendencies toward collective reproduction and the re-combinatory alteration of a shared repertoire. Commonalities may also be seen in the diminishing distinctions between the producer and the consumer in this context, and also in the almost entirely non-commercial posture held in both cultural practices.

Before proceeding to a consideration of post-dictatorship period, I wish to underscore two key points raised here. First, the ideological dichotomy between the culture as capital-accumulating commodity model promoted under Pinochet and the non-commercial, activist/populist cultural model previously advanced by the Allende regime that continued under the creative auspices of the Alerce label became increasingly entrenched throughout the dictatorship years. This is highly significant since the cleavage between these fundamentally opposing ideals continues to animate social and political discourse and to contribute to what Kenneth Aman has explained as the “two cultures” coexisting in Chile (1991). Secondly, the example of the audiocassette’s arrival in Chile illustrates the extent to which the exploitation of new media technologies may influence musical production and social interaction. As anthropologist Louise Meintjes observes, media not only transmit content, they transform it (2003:8). Hence, as media technologies

change, so does the nature of the content they circulate, as well as the individual and social processes involved in its production and reception.

Democratic Re-Transition and Post-Dictatorship Transformations in the Chilean Music Industry 1990-2000

In October 1988 Chilean citizens participated in a historic plebiscite to choose whether the country would remain under the auspices of the Pinochet dictatorship for another 8 years. Mounting pressure from recently reinvigorated social movements in the country had joined with an international human rights campaign and foreign diplomatic insistence to force Pinochet's hand in attempting to gain democratic legitimacy for the continuation of his regime. Still, the victory of the "No" vote stunned the *Pinochetistas*, who no doubt expected a repeat of the overwhelming success they achieved in a similar plebiscite in 1980. With the subsequent victory of presidential candidate Patricio Aylwin of the Center-Left *Concertación* coalition in December of the same year, the Pinochet era thus finally drew to a close. Pinochet himself, however, took full advantage of the ensuing yearlong transition to shift public assets to private supporters, to stack the judiciary with sympathetic judges, and to bolster his continuing constitutional authority as head of the Chilean armed forces and senator for life. Indeed, historian Steve Stern explains, for these and other reasons (including the ongoing threat of another coup), "the social climate and structure of power in the immediate postplebiscite period created a democratic opening, not a fast track to vigorous democracy" (2010:1). Electoral triumph had given way to the gritty struggle of nurturing *convivencia*, or conviviality, in a society torn apart by ideological divisions and competing interpretations of the traumatic events of the past (Ibid.).

Amidst this tenuous transition a new cultural environment also emerged – one marked by a deep “memory impasse” over the historical legacy of the dictatorship years, as well as by an increase in the consolidation of the media and in the privatization, commercialization, and individualization of the public sphere (Ibid.:14, xxxi, 9). These shifting social and logistical circumstances deeply impacted the Chilean music scene, which in many ways languished without direction or grassroots engagement throughout this period. Concerning the “memory impasse,” Stern explains:

Cultural belief by a majority in the truth of cruel human rupture and persecution under dictatorship, and in the moral urgency of justice, unfolded alongside political belief that Pinochet, the military, and their social base of supporters and sympathizers remained too strong for Chile to take logical “next steps” along the road of truth and justice. (2010:xxxii)

In tandem with this political stalemate, however, the musical development of this period became entangled in its own impasse, and for similar reasons. A meaningful “next step” in terms of either nationalist expression or social commitment in Chilean music for the most part failed to surface throughout the 90s. While Stern notes, “concentration of ownership, ideological conformity, [and] self-censorship, fostered journalistic timidity” (Ibid.:223), the same conditions generated a similar impulse towards caution and conformity in the arts. The uncertain sense of direction for Chile’s future had given rise to an interesting paradox – just as the freedom of uninhibited public expression was returning to Chilean social life, the content of much of the music being produced and broadcast in Chile was becoming increasingly disengaged from the political complexities and unresolved social traumas being played out in the dictatorship’s aftermath. The vanguard nationalist tendencies of the previous decades had given way to a renewed interest and reliance on foreign pop and rock aesthetics, as many Chilean musicians and

music fans sought refuge in transnational cultural immersion as a means of escaping the complications at home.

To be sure, most of the *nueva canción* artists, who had spent the dictatorship in exile, returned to Chile and actively performed there throughout the 90s and into the new millennium. However, their presence and that of the *canto nuevo* artists who succeeded them remained largely nostalgic. Though their more familiar repertoire may have helped some reconnect with the memory and promise of the Allende years, it failed to speak directly to the unique experience of the youth generation that had grown up under dictatorship. Neither did it contribute to a modern musical aesthetic capable of expressing a vision for a viable future. As Fabio Salas suggests, “the old standards, the Manns, the Parras, the Carrascos [Quilapayún] and Salinas [Inti-Illimani], had already done what they had to do and said what they had to say, and to expect more from them [was] useless” (2003:224).

From another angle, the realignment of Chilean media structures, along with exacerbating the expressive complications of the untidy memory question, played its own role in transforming the style and content of the music being created and received in the public sphere. This scenario arose as a particular irony. Through the dictatorship years, a sense of shared repression helped to sustain the imagined sense of solidarity and community in Chilean society, particularly for those affiliated with the embattled Chilean left. This sense of collectivism had been supported by a certain degree of media activism, ingenuity, and diversity, as evidenced in the field of music by Alerce, magazines like *La Bicicleta*,⁴² and the clandestine cassette circulation, of the 1980s. As the threat of

⁴² *La Bicicleta*, published from the late 70s through the early 80s, helped to bolster the same socio-cultural tendencies as Alerce by providing music-related reports, reviews, and interviews. The magazine also

dictatorship receded, however, so too did the alternative media channels that had arisen in large part to subvert and contest the regime.

Speaking to the implications of this development for the broader media context, Rosalind Bresnahan outlines a close relationship between the “neoliberal transformation,” associated with the *Concertación*’s continuation and expansion of the economic policies introduced during the dictatorship, and the media policies implemented during the transition.⁴³ As she observes, far from recognizing and supporting the democratic potential of the alternative and oppositional media platforms that had circulated in “clandestine and semiclandestine” channels through the 1980s, the *Concertación*’s approach to these grassroots circuits of communication and expression ranged from indifference to hostility, and in some cases they “actively contributed to their demise” (2003:46-47). Bresnahan further explains:

[T]he dramatic decline of media diversity since 1990 highlights the *Concertación*’s failure to treat the media as a crucial democratic site whose openness to all sectors of civil society should be actively supported by public policy. Instead, the *Concertación*’s embrace of the neoliberal conception of media democratization has facilitated national and transnational corporate control of the principal means of public expression and consolidated a consumerist, entertainment model incompatible with the democratic need for a diverse and vigorous public sphere. (Ibid.:40)

Adding to these observations, Steve Stern notes how the nature of the *Concertacionista* transition implemented market-driven policies in relation to “every sector of life” (2010:27). This contributed to a social formation wherein:

helped to encourage the democratic inclinations of the socialist song movement by publishing songbooks that enabling non-professional participants to engage with this material and to contribute to its social production and dissemination.

⁴³ Further addressing the continuation of dictatorship policies during the transition period, along with the deep sense of disappointment it fostered, historians Gabriel Salazar and Julio Pinto state, “In a word, the concertacionist elites, incapable of significantly influencing the neoliberal hegemonic order, have incorporated themselves into its logic, or submerged themselves in despondency due to lack of proposals. In practice if not in intention, the true social power continues under the firm control of the elites as always” (1999:64).

[T]he privatization of culture grew more powerful and tipped the balance toward the individual as self-actualizing agent and consumer, away from the individual as citizen whose actualization occurs through relationship of mutual claims with state, society, and community. (Ibid.:9)

While the nature of dictatorship had provided an imperative, at least in some circles, for collective mobilization and identification and for the circulation of meaningful communication and expression as a motive in its own right, with the transition and its neoliberal expansion, individualized consumerism regained its position as the primary governing principle for public exchange and expression.

Like other manifestations of Chilean media production and circulation, these circumstances deeply impacted the field of music. As the doors of the country reopened to foreign investment, the major transnational labels (EMI, BMG, Warner Music, and Universal) reasserted their presence forcefully, reengaging the region as a market for foreign acts while also establishing A & R divisions in the capital to find and develop local talent (Espinosa 2011:99). This new source of financial and logistical support, which lavished anointed acts with access to high quality recording studios, international touring opportunities, and coordinated marketing campaigns, allowed artists like Los Tres, La Ley, and Lucy Bell to achieve new heights of professionalism and commercial success, in Chile and throughout Latin America. As Salas observes, however, the local industry's external benefactors somewhat arbitrarily selected artists that were "functional" to the exclusion of "those that were non-commercial and that represented a conflict" (2003:199). Felipe Espinosa adds that rather than cultivating an environment that advanced the musical vanguard, the tendency of the 90s leaned more in the direction of "laboratory formulas" that reduced commercial risk (2011:57). Moreover, in my own conversation with Jorge Santis, drummer from the indie-rock group Congelador, which

formed in the mid-90s, he summarized the scene by noting that at this moment, “Chilean music became a business . . . They signed a lot of groups and many didn’t have any quality . . . So they spent a lot of money and it ended in failure” (personal interview, Santiago, 3/14/13). In addition to referencing the industry’s objective failure to recoup their investments, Santis’s statements reflect the subjective opinion held by many Chilean critics and musicians that this scenario contributed to an epoch in which Chilean music failed to contribute meaningfully to either national cultural expression or international popular music trends.

Despite certain exceptions to the rule, major label domination applied significant pressure to conform local music production to commercially driven aesthetic templates. It transformed the local scene by crowding out possibilities for fostering more democratically oriented and locally rooted options for diffusion. The collusion of the major labels with the broadcast mediums of radio and television and the absence of public subsidies for local gestation meant that more independent initiatives also found it difficult to remain competitive in the new landscape. As a result, labels like Alerce and the re-constituted DICAP began to lose their relevancy in the production of local music and their catalogs were eventually bought out (Espinosa 2011:99). Similarly, this environment made it difficult for new local initiatives to form; so much so, that in considering the extensive foreign investment and intervention in the local industry, Espinosa even questions the underlying motives of these firms, suggesting that they were “more interested in controlling supply and demand than on any true commitment to raising local production” (Ibid.:134). He adds that the controlling nature of the contracts

signed by local artists actually impeded the development of local talent to the benefit of the foreign artists “for whom [the major labels] really worked” (Ibid.).⁴⁴

Regardless of one’s take on this perspective, statistics do confirm, despite increased major label support for local musicians, foreign artists continued to overwhelmingly dominate the airwaves and the record shelves in the early 90s, as a mere 8% of the music disseminated on radio and 20-30% of the albums sold in the country belonged to the national market (Carrasco 1993:21). In light of this predilection for escapism and transnational intervention, the musical landscape of 90s thus returned full circle to mirror that of the 1960s prior to the emergence of *nueva canción*, albeit with a slightly heightened level of professionalism and some international reach.

Still, by the turn of the century, the transnational record industry itself was approaching a revolutionary transformation that would play out in Chile as it did in much of the rest of the world. In fact, for various reasons, the complications for this industry began surfacing in Chile and other areas of the capitalist periphery even sooner than they did in more central markets. As both Salas and Santis point out, the somewhat reckless and arbitrary foreign investments made in the local scene resulted in a series of complete commercial failures, due in large part to a lack of understanding concerning local consumer demand. By the late 90s, this precedent had already caused labels to drastically reduce their local signings and apply an increasingly conservative approach to local music production. Additionally, piracy, which first surfaced as a concern in Chile in the 80s with the introduction of the recordable cassette, became even more problematic in the

⁴⁴ This view was corroborated in personal interview (12/4/12) with Sebastian Milos, the head of Chile’s digital music distribution platform Portaldisc. He cited the “ridiculous” nature of the contractual restrictions placed on an EMI signed band that he managed in mid 2000s. As an example, he cited having to obtain authorization from the label simply to go on the radio to conduct an interview.

90s with the increased simplicity and higher fidelity of CD duplication. Of course, this issue would develop into a full-fledged epidemic for the industry in general moving into the following decade. But even as the 20th-century drew to a close, the major labels' fledgling efforts in Chile led them to begin closing their local offices. By the early 2000s these corporations had almost entirely dissolved their interests in Chilean music production. Once again the field of Chilean music found itself in a state of crisis.

* * *

To summarize thus far, the mainstream production, dissemination, and consumption patterns that governed the circulation of recorded music throughout the 20th-century instituted an overwhelmingly commercial paradigm that generally served to uphold hegemonic power structures. As they did elsewhere around the world, these circumstances dominated cultural trends in Chile. Nevertheless, an ideologically driven countercurrent to this paradigm also surfaced in various Chilean musical and organizational practices during this period. Connected to the left-leaning musical and political vanguard in the country, this crosscurrent motivated continuing attempts to subvert industry hegemony and carve out non-commercially oriented space for social, political, and purely creative purposes. Consequently, manifestations of this sub-current, as seen in alternative labels like DICAP and Alerce, the clandestine cassette circulation of the 80s, and the digital piracy of the 90s and early 00s, represent precursors to the netlabel movement that began to arise in the mid 00s from the same social proclivities.

Chapter III

“My Music Is Not A Business”: New Media Transformations and the Arrival of the Netlabel as an Alternative Model of Music Diffusion

The way we are taught about music, and the way it's socially and economically positioned, affect whether it's integrated (or not) into our lives, and even what kind of music might come into existence in the future. Capitalism tends toward the creation of passive consumers, and in many ways this tendency is counterproductive.

- David Byrne (2012:268)

The occasionally scenic and often chaotic Plaza Baquedano (a.k.a Plaza Italia) serves as an important intersection at the center of the ever-developing metropolis that is Santiago de Chile. Situated beside the Mapoche River – which descends from the looming Andes through a dirty canal that divides the city between north and south – this roundabout plaza similarly divides the capital between east and west. A historic meeting place for rallies, protests, and celebrations, the plaza serves as a metaphoric crossroads as well, helping to sort Santiago's municipalities economically between the haves and the have-lesses.

It is here, on a brisk late August morning in 2011, beneath the statue of the mounted 19th-century Chilean general Manuel Baquedano,¹ where I stand and observe as an enormous crowd gathers. Having arrived early, I am positioned near the center of an already invigorated mass of students, union workers, indigenous rights activists,

¹ Baquedano's accomplishments include going to war with Peru to the north and helping to finally pacify Chile's unruly indigenous Mapuche population to the south.

journalists, and curious bystanders that continues to swell from the seemingly endless tributaries of humanity flowing in from all directions. An air of jubilation, anticipation, and excitement grips the scene.

Indicative of the diversity of the assembly, near me a syndicate of nurses convenes. On the other side of them stands a soccer team. Each gathers behind a banner declaring their affiliation, as do countless other organizations dispersed across the plaza. Families with children and at least one elderly person pushed in a wheelchair linger alongside young adults wearing elaborate and ironic costumes. Others proudly exhibit homemade t-shirts, signs, and banners with slogans that denounce governmental policies, decry economic inequities, and demand alternatives, often with comedic overtones.

Some raise Chilean flags. Others carry the multicolored standards of Chile's indigenous Mapuche and Aymara populations. Still others wave images of leftist martyrs like Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, and Victor Jara. All the while, impromptu performance troupes rehearse dance steps to *cumbia* and *samba* rhythms that clash and intermingle with the sound of panpipe ensembles. In turn, all of these sounds are occasionally drowned out by the unison chants, "Y va a caer, Y va a caer, la educación de Pinochet!!! (It's going to fall, It's going to fall, the education [system] of Pinochet)."

The ambience is carnivalesque, more akin to the prelude to some festive procession than to a serious political demonstration. Yet, belying the celebratory atmosphere, a menacing presence lurks on the plaza's periphery as well. To the west a company of armored vehicles, equipped with water cannons and tear gas canisters lies in wait. Nearby, a regiment of shielded and stoically faced riot police stands ready to

intervene lest the protest threaten to spill out of its containment. An intimidating reminder of the nation's troubled history of authoritarianism, the symbolism is lost on no one.

Despite the implied risks, soon anxious waiting turns to motion, potential energy turns kinetic, and the crowd begins to march. South past the forested Parque Bustamante, the *cumbia* rhythms provide the momentum. In time with the steady pace, some dance, some chant, though most simply converse with their compatriots as they stride. Turning west, the cavalcade passes beneath shyly waving domestic workers and children, who glance down in subversive appropriation from the windows and balconies of apartment complexes. As the collective advances, the ebb and flow of the march moves a panpipe *conjunto* to the center of the shifting soundscape; they rock and sway in breathy incantation, occasionally emphasizing a phrase with a twirl. A few blocks further on the entire procession breaks out in a spontaneous rendition of the *nueva canción* anthem, “El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido (The People United Will Never Be Defeated)” – a moving gesture that symbolically ties this movement to the nation's socialist past and to the more specific precedent of free and quality education for all, as implemented during Allende's regime and abolished by his successor.

After an hour or so on the move, winding through a prescribed circuit of city streets cordoned off by riot police waiting at each intersection, we arrive back at Santiago's central thoroughfare *La Alameda*. There, exhausted and enthused, a sea of people basks in celebratory communion. In the final moments before tear gas disperses the throngs,² I ponder the sentiments extolled on the signs that surround me. Beneath a depiction of Allende read the words, “In your memory the dream continues.” Alongside singer-songwriter Victor Jara's defiant image, his most iconic lyric proclaims, “I do not

² Such rallies routinely end with tear gas and small altercations between riot police and a few protestors.

sing just to sing, or because I have a good voice, but because the guitar has feeling and reason.” Most emblematic of all, a hand painted sign raised above the crowd depicts a notion I have encountered on multiple occasions since my arrival. It states simply, “Otra Chile es posible (Another Chile is possible).”



Fig. 3.1: Santiago protest march. (Clockwise from upper left) Sign stating “Another Chile Is Possible – Secular, Non-sexist, Public Education;” depictions of Salvador Allende and Victor Jara; costumed protestors with Mapuche flag; a pan pipe troupe performing for *Caribineros* (riot police).

* * *

When I first arrived to Chile in August 2011, the country had reached the near apex of a massive, several-months-long social movement. The previous May, images broadcast from the Arab Spring uprisings helped to incite a lateral mobilization in Chile.³

³ Arguably, the globally broadcast images of massive student rallies in Chile helped to inspire the briefly influential Occupy Wall Street movement that emerged in the United States in September of the same year in relation to similar principles and grievances.

For the first time since the democracy movement that helped to remove Pinochet in the late 80s, and on a scale not seen in the country since the contentious democratic-socialist rallies of the *Unidad Popular* era in the late 60s and early 70s (see chapter II), Chilean activists had taken their dissatisfaction to the streets.

The primary issue at hand was Chile's privatized education model. Initiated as part of the neoliberal transformations of the Pinochet regime, many viewed this as a source of economic entrapment and a key impediment to upward mobility for the nation's working classes.⁴ As a result of the mounting political action, the country's entire higher and secondary education system ground to a halt for several months. Students went on strike, occupying buildings and inciting massive and highly disruptive demonstrations in every major city in the country on a near weekly basis. As the movement progressed, it also quickly extended beyond its primary focus on "free and quality education," growing to encompass a portfolio of sympathetic concerns relating to indigenous land rights, income inequality, and environmental concerns, among other issues.

Just as it had during the turbulent mobilizations that brought Allende to power in 1970, music played a fundamental role in these mobilizations. Committed expressions appeared in the streets, as well as in festivals, rallies, and concerts.⁵ To a somewhat lesser extent they surfaced in the country's mediated popular music scene, as artists like troubadour Manuel Garcia, singer-songwriter Camila Moreno, and international hip-hop star Ana Tijoux, among others, paid these concerns mind in songs that occasionally

⁴ For instance, another sign from the rally stated, "I pay to go to school, and I go to school so I can pay."

⁵ Just days before the demonstration outlined above, I attended an all-day music festival held at Santiago's Parque O'Higgins. Herein old-guard *nueva canción* and *nueva trova* artists like Inti-Illimani and Santiago del Nuevo Extremo shared the stage with several up-and-coming pop, rock, punk, and *cumbia* acts, for the expressed purpose of supporting the student movement. Like many such events this scenario helped to traditionalize newer acts in relation to the politicized legacy of their forebears, while simultaneously rejuvenating the relevance of these elder statesmen of Chilean popular song.

reached the airwaves. Yet, in tandem with these manifestations sounding in and around Chile's central public sphere, a similar impulse played out on the margins of Chilean popular culture as well, through a series of vanguard practices that gave rise to new approaches for music dissemination, in addition to innovative musical productions.

In this chapter and throughout the rest of this dissertation I turn my attention to the latter of these expressive conduits. I argue that even though these vanguard expressions circulate through comparatively 'underground' networks of gestation and diffusion, in many ways they resonate in greater accord with the core principles of Chile's contemporary (and historical) social movements than many of the musical soundings circulating closer to the surface of public consciousness. What is more, while these underground practices may ultimately remain less influential to the everyday dynamics of Chilean socio-cultural life, I suggest they may actually portend a much greater transformation unfolding at the transnational level.

“My Music Is Not a Business”

This chapter documents the arrival of the Chilean netlabel movement, which emerged in the first decade of the 21st-century, as a non-commercial alternative to the culture industry model that largely defined the patterns of music production and media circulation throughout the 20th-century. It seeks to define this movement's intersections with both its local context, as well as with larger transnational transformations in cultural exchange. It argues that this phenomenon represents a manifestation of an emerging paradigm shift in 21st-century music production and dissemination – a transformation involving the confluence of social and technological factors that include the mass

accessibility of new music production technologies, the proliferation of social media communication networks, and the international adoption of Creative Commons licensing models. Furthermore, this chapter explores how the local manifestation of this movement follows in the footsteps of the more non-commercially oriented and ideologically driven musical tendencies that surfaced in various incarnations throughout Chilean history, as outlined in the previous chapter.

While at first glance this topic may seem somewhat removed from the scene described in the foreword to this chapter, I begin my analysis of Chilean netlabels with this depiction for two key reasons. The first is contextual. Chile's student/leftist movement unfolded as the socio-political backdrop to my entire ethnographic investigation in Chile. Many of the netlabel musicians involved in this study also remain committed or at least sympathetic to the ideals embraced by these mobilizations. Hence, much of the iconography, thematic imagery, and political and ideological resolve that characterize the actual artistic output associated with this scene can only be understood in light of these contestations and their wider historical context (see chapter II).

In this respect, an intriguing album produced by the Punta Arenas-based electronic duo Lluvia Acida and released through the Chilean electronic music netlabel Pueblo Nuevo in December 2012 serves as a fitting example. Entitled *El Saqueo* (The Sacking) and offered as a “sonic response and critique to the paradigm in which we are immersed,”⁶ this work lays out a thorough indictment of contemporary socio-economic trends in Chile. Beginning with the instrumental, yet bitingly aggressive, electronic composition “Estado Neoliberal (Neoliberal State),” the album proceeds through a series

⁶ This quotation comes from the album liner notes, which can be found along with a link to download the album at: <https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/el-saqueo/>.

of issue-based tracks before ultimately reaching its conclusion with the inspiring anthem, “Vengamos Todos (Come On Everyone)” – released with a corresponding video featuring images captured from the ongoing demonstrations.⁷



Fig. 3.2: Cover art for Lluvia Acida’s *El Saqueo*

This correlation between content and context in Chile’s netlabel scene is not unique when compared to broader musical developments in the country.⁸ Yet, the non-commercial means of this album’s diffusion *do* reflect a significant innovation – one that highlights a second correlation uniting Chile’s netlabel movement with the larger socio-political trends outlined above.

At the very heart of Chile’s most recent mobilizations lies the notion that some facets of society should be insulated from the profit motives of capitalist enterprise. The

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9LmF4s-Uzw>

⁸ Even Lluvia Acida’s own liner notes to their *El Saqueo* release suggest, “To make denunciations and to assume social commitments through music is nothing new” (pueblonuevo.cl).

aforementioned vision of “another possible Chile,” which animates the imaginary of the Chilean Left, suggests that the most basic objectives of national (and human) priorities like education, healthcare, and environmental management, among others, may be compromised when the capital interests of the privileged few are placed in contention with the public interests of the many. As argued throughout the previous chapter, this same principle has commonly been extended to the domain of culture and the arts in Chilean public discourse (as it has in many other parts of the world), under the assumption that as industry profit motives enter the equation, artists may bend to their commercial designs, thus potentially compromising their sincerity and their connection to genuine popular consciousness.

In this respect, the netlabel movement embodies some of the central ideals of the socialist alternative demanded by contemporary activists. In circumnavigating the previously mandatory arbitration of commerce, the netlabel medium stands apart from the ‘neoliberal’ public sphere as a collective venue for the mediated exchange of artistic expressions and ideas. It represents a context for the largely uninhibited cultivation of ‘popular culture,’ as defined by its proximity to the consciousness and practice of everyday, non-professional contributors. Also, by rethinking longstanding conventions concerning artistic presentation and exchange, and by giving license to Chile’s musical vanguard to blaze new creative trails, this phenomenon constitutes a realization of the “future imaginaries” and the “appeal to the virtual,” that sociologists like Fernando Coronil (2011) and Arturo Escobar (2010) argue have been an essential characteristic of the social movements associated with the recent “turn to the left” in several Latin American countries (see chapter I). Yet, perhaps most important of all, the netlabel

medium provides space for artists to simply exist and contribute to society as creative citizens without necessarily becoming impresarios or proprietors of commoditized culture products – a benefit that may transcend ideological postures altogether.

In my attempt to outline the social dynamics of this emergent phenomenon, I organize the continuation of this chapter by first discussing the arrival of the Internet and other digital technologies, which became commonplace in Chile around the turn of the 21st century. Insofar as the integration of these technologies transformed all sectors of the mediated musical production in Chile, I then explore the nascent models and manifestations of commercial music production and circulation emerging from this cultural landscape. Next, I investigate how the local netlabel scene emerged and evolved as an alternative response to similar social and technological realities. I trace the historical origins of this movement, introduce some of its principle players and organizational objectives, and attempt to define the loose boundaries that characterize this phenomenon as a new art world manifestation for the digital age. Lastly, I conclude by returning to the ideological dimensions of this phenomenon, both in relation to socio-political tendencies in Chile and larger international trends.

To be clear, while these inquiries outline an essentially non-commercial archetype for the creation and distribution of musical expression taking shape in the 21st century, I do not see this new model, of which the netlabel movement is only a small part, as a replacement for the more commercially oriented, industry-dominated paradigm that took hold in the previous century. I also do not believe this represents an inherently more valiant or artistically genuine channel for the distribution of music. Indeed, I do not even view these two approaches as necessarily at odds with one another. Rather, I believe this

new art world formation simply functions as an important alternative – a previously uncharted route for the non-commercial, local and translocal exchange of recorded music that may very well coexist with and at times reinvigorate its commercial counterpart.

Nevertheless, as will be shown in this chapter and throughout the rest of this dissertation, it is this technologically mediated alternative that allows many non-professionally oriented netlabel artists to live by the ideal expressed in the phrase, “*Mi música no es un negocio* (My music is not a business),” which several of my correspondents declared in only slightly varying terminology throughout the course of my ethnographic inquiries.⁹

The Turn of the Century and the Arrival of the Internet

In the final years of the 20th century, technological innovations brought a new set of challenges to the traditional economic model of the music industry, as much in Chile as in the rest of the world. At the same time, this new technological reality delivered new prospects as well, especially for the many musicians and music consumers whose interests were marginalized or obstructed under the previous paradigm. These simultaneously disruptive and reconstructive trajectories signaled a shift in the economic equilibrium of musical exchange – a moment with the potential for social and cultural realignment. They did not, however, necessarily suggest technologically predetermined social outcomes at the outset. Hence, as I begin to consider the idiosyncratic assimilation of the digital revolution within Chilean society, I do so with an eye to the unique cultural and historical conditions discussed so far. I suggest these conditions helped to shape the nature of this technological assimilation within two vaguely disparate Chilean art worlds

⁹ Another variant of this sentiment was simply, “*Ya no soy un negocio* (I am not a business).”

– one oriented towards commercial success and mass appeal, and another directed to more non-commercial and often artistically experimental and/or ideologically motivated ends.

To first establish the overarching technological context influencing all sectors of Chilean music, even a passing glance at statistics related to Internet access in Chile, and those related to albums sales in the country over a similar period of time, reveals a correlation that is unmistakable and inversely proportional. Telecommunications deregulation in 1995 created an immediate expansion of Internet providers and users (Stern 2010:227); and despite high costs and unequal distribution across economic strata, Chile maintained sustained growth in Internet connectivity in the years that followed (Chilean Internet Report 2011).¹⁰ Conversely, statistics concerning national record sales illustrate an equally precipitous drop of 62% from 1996 to 2006 (Otero 2011:18). Only in the mid 2000s did this dramatic slide begin to level out and inch back in the opposite direction, thus signaling a stabilization and recalibration of the market in relation to the new technological reality (Espinosa 2011:101).

By now the story of this correlation between the rise of the Internet and the decline of the transnational music industry has become common knowledge for many (see Kott 2009). The MP3 file format, first invented in the late 80s as a form of digital compression, enabled greater ease of storage and distribution for audio data. Nearly a decade later Internet based file-sharing programs like Napster, Gnutella, KaZaa, and Audioglaxay revealed new potentials for this technological development when they

¹⁰ This access has continued to grow in the last decade as a government report released in 2011 documents that residential connections have increased 2.5 times over a four-year period beginning in 2005. Likewise, the percentage of the population reporting use of the Internet over the preceding 12-month period has similarly risen from 29.9% in 2005, to 55.9% in 2009 (Internet Report).

began providing music consumers with a platform to easily search, access, and transfer MP3 files stored on any computer hard drive connected to these online networks.

Together these advances contributed to the unprecedented illicit exchange of musical commodities over the Internet – a phenomenon that logically precipitated a corresponding dip in record industry profits, and a vehement legal backlash.

Nonetheless, while piracy became a global issue in the midst of this technological revolution, extra-legal music distribution already had deep roots in Chile. Here, this social cross current to music-industry economics evolved significantly over several decades, arising from varying motives instilled by the country's unusual geographic, political, and economic circumstances, only to become more entrenched with each successive technology.

At least three interrelated circumstances helped to fuel this local trend. At the most basic level, many Chilean citizens demonstrated a lack of respect or appreciation of the recorded musical artifact as a commodity worthy of intellectual property rights protection. As 80s musician Scottie Scott once complained, the local belief that “intellectual creation grows on trees and that someone pays but not me” (in Fuenzalida 1987:14) remained particularly strong in Chile. Over the years lax government oversight and enforcement of copyright law also did little to discourage the spread of this outlook.

On another level, various interlocutors informed me that digital piracy, like the cassette and CDR variant that preceded it, provided a means for consumers to obtain musical products that were simply not physically present or obtainable in the local commercial market by any other means. Given the country's distance from the epicenters of the culture industry, the act of dubbing a cassette or CD from friends who obtained

copies overseas or from among the limited and exorbitantly priced quantities available locally was driven in many cases as much by necessity as by any proclivity for intellectual property theft.

Lastly, piracy also maintained a connection to a subtle, distinct, and longstanding ideological tendency in Chile that gravitated to forms of cultural exchange and appropriation “disembedded from official world economics” (Larkin 2008:218). As seen with DICAP, Alerce, and with the clandestine cassette circulation under dictatorship (see chapter II), circumnavigating the central channels of the music industry had long been viewed by many as an act of defiance against foreign capitalist hegemony that instilled a heightened appreciation for the recordings acquired through these backchannels, even when audio quality suffered as a result (Jordan 2009). Many (Chilean youth in particular) interpreted the arrival of file sharing technologies as an even more efficient means of achieving this preconceived social end. They represented mechanisms for decentering the commercial industry’s dominance in delineating the patterns of musical consumption and exchange, and they were successful in doing so. Regardless of the intentions involved, the impact of digital piracy further diminished major label dominance over local music production to the point of near irrelevance.

For the limited numbers of Chilean musicians fortunate enough to acquire a major label contract in the 1990s, the dissolution of the influence and support of these institutions came as a major blow, particularly when the nature of their contracts precluded them from pursuing other alternatives in the immediate aftermath (Espinosa 2011). Yet, for others whose fortunes had fared less well under the previous model, the industry collapse represented a significant opening. Advances in digital audio recording

and production capabilities and the corresponding reduction in costs associated with these technologies provided more opportunities for musicians to self-produce relatively professional sounding works.¹¹ Additionally, the same Internet technologies that contributed to the downfall of the majors now allowed for unparalleled models of independent distribution and promotion for these ‘homemade’ productions.¹² As major label influence faded at the turn of the 21st century, these circumstances helped to usher in a new wave of independent initiatives to fill the void. The balance again shifted in the direction of greater local control over music production and dissemination, even if commercial viability still remained out of reach for many (as it always had).

The career trajectory traced by the intrepid indie rock band Congelador provides an example of this independent streak and its broader influence on the local music scene. In the 90s, this trio pushed the boundaries of the local popular music aesthetic by performing and recording loosely constructed compositions that evolved as long, instrumental, and often improvisational explorations of sonic timbre and texture. Their genre-bending experimentations had little hope of finding a home within the major label system at that time. In an interview, moreover, drummer Jorge Santis candidly described the process through which his band decided to self-produce their first album in the late 1990s.

¹¹ As early as 1993 Chilean producer Alejandro Lyon was acknowledging the influence of new recording technologies in Chile. During a music industry panel discussion held that year he thus stated, “The other important process occurring in our country is the arrival of technology for domestic use, in other words, recording studios or equipment necessary for producing in one’s own home while drinking coffee, that which, evidently, reduces the costs of production. . . . With the advent of digital processes all this has been reduced [costs, time, etc.], permitting these types of activities” (In Carrasco et. al. 1993:41).

¹² In the same seminar referenced above Eduardo Carrasco makes the following point about this second issue as well; “together with the scientific/technical revolution, the development of the mass media has generated decisive changes in the diffusion of the musical products, opening the global market to what a solitary creator is able to make in a remote room in his or her house” (Carrasco et. al. 1993:19).

[I]n our case, for example, we were thinking that [the major label] path wasn't realistic, it could be that we could compromise all these things, knowing that we could end up in failure as well. So we opted to begin to make our own label. And so like us many groups started down the same path, with the first steps toward ... independent discs. (Personal interview, Santiago, 3/14/13)

The path pursued by Santis and his band mates reflects several broader trends influencing local music production in Chile since the turn of the century. As Santis explained, the band recorded their first album live on a Tascam Digital 8 track recorder (see Fig. 3.3), a relatively affordable piece of consumer electronic technology introduced in the 1990s for the burgeoning home recording market. Though slightly larger than a standard laptop computer, this machine was capable of simultaneously capturing and editing multiple audio inputs, while generating remarkably high quality musical productions. The device thereby provided Congelador with an opportunity to sidestep the numerous gate-keeping obstacles associated with studio recording facilities.



Fig. 3.3: Tascam 788 Digital Portastudio, similar to the 8 track recorder used by Congelador (Author's personal collection).

Also, though Congelador began their career by distributing their self-produced CDs to local record stores, Santis notes that the Internet enabled his band to disseminate their work and internationalize their careers to a previously unimaginable extent. As he related:

I believe that we were lucky to live during this period, because before the only option was to affiliate with a label. Maybe many groups that were great or did something distinct, interesting, they disappeared because they didn't have tools for demonstrating their music. (Ibid.)

Finally, the broader implications of this band's story relate to the decision to create their own label for releasing and promoting their music. Santis noted the group had already realized that "other labels weren't offering anything" (Ibid.), particularly as the monopoly these organizations held over production and dissemination dissipated with evolving technological shifts. Capitalizing on the opportunities referenced above, the group thus chose chart their own course. Like many successful independent initiatives, this band's label, Quemascabeza (Burn Your Head), slowly grew to encompass and distribute first the works of friends and then other similarly minded musicians. Fifteen years later, the label (currently headed by Jorge's brother and band mate Rodrigo Santis) has become the most recognizable, reputable, and professional independent label in Chile, representing dozens of Chile's most popular recording artists, and echoing the example of predecessors like DICAP and Alerce as a champion of local music production.

A 'New Paradise of Chilean Pop': Local Independent Music in Ascendancy

While Quemascabeza's success in breaking new artists both locally and internationally has been remarkable, it has not been unique. Dozens of artist collectives

and indie labels formed in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the major labels, with many achieving comparable levels of success and recognition. Out of this field of renewed and dispersed local gestation, a more unified, eclectic, and vibrant popular music scene began to emerge in the late 00s. As this momentum continued to build, moreover, the Spanish newspaper *El País* published a short article in 2011 welcoming a new generation of Chilean musicians to international recognition, and enthusiastically branding the Andean nation “The New Paradise of Pop.”¹³ Many in Chile greeted the article, which profiled Quemasucabeza artists like folk-pop icon Gepe and electro-pop provocateur Javiera Mena, with significant fanfare. Somewhat ironically, local newspapers heralded the Spanish article as a newsworthy occasion in and of itself: Chilean music was finally capturing international attention for the first time since the sounds of *nueva canción* began traversing the Andes nearly a half-century before. As Gepe noted in the initial publication:

Things have changed so much that 10 years seem like 30. Everything has grown exponentially, from the musical contributions to the public and the places. It gives me the impression that Chilean music, in general terms, still finds itself in a state of incubation and that it still lacks a little something to give birth to it in an official manner. But what I see is very auspicious. It seems that Chile, and being Chilean, is an advantage to making music in these times.

Along with the advances in production technologies referenced above, within the ten-year period referenced by Gepe (2000-2010) a few additional significant factors helped to jumpstart the successful reboot of the local independent music industry. One relates to the implementation of a new national culture policy, while another involved new means for online commercial dissemination in the region. Concerning the former, in 2004 socialist president Ricardo Lagos, having wrestled leadership of the Concertación

¹³ http://elpais.com/diario/2011/02/04/tentaciones/1296847374_850215.html

coalition away from its more centrist factions four years before, signed legislation (19.928) that reinstated government support for culture and the arts. This law's directives included specific mandates to establish a council for the development of national music, as well as an annual fund of 1.434 million pesos (about 2.5 million US dollars) to stimulate musical activity in the nation. After allowing local musical culture to languish in a field of laissez faire market economics for more than thirty years, Chile re-adopted a policy that offered significant public subsidies for developing and disseminating the country's musical heritage. Incidentally, although likely not coincidentally, this same year marked the turning point at which overall music sales finally began to regain growth in the country after their decade long decline.

The stipulations for the music development council and the corresponding funds mandated the development of all stages of musical gestation, from creation to consumption. It placed specific emphasis on encouraging the implementation of new technologies for production and dissemination, as well as in fostering new organizational links between music makers and between these creative entities and the private sector. Even more importantly, it established an annual competitive fund that offered financial support to artists and entrepreneurs for creative musical projects (like recording a new CD), cultural events (like music festivals), and organizational initiatives (like establishing a new label), among other possibilities.¹⁴

It is important to note that even as the government began to revalue musical culture as a social value in its own right, this policy still went forth from the perspective that music could and should retain its commercial affiliations and appeal wherever

¹⁴ While the overarching cultural concourse has been nicked named Fondart - a linguistic merger of 'fondo'(fund) and 'art,' the musical branch of the competition has adopted the name Fonmus.

possible. In other words, this policy viewed the country's musical culture as a class of local industry with potential for economic growth, and it was largely this economic potential that officials used to justify and allocate public investment.¹⁵ Furthermore, this perspective gained ground within the new conservative administration of Sebastian Piñera in 2010, as the original law's mandates were altered to require a certain level of economic self-sufficiency for all projects receiving government funds (first 50%, and then 25% in the face public backlash). Reiterating this policy shift, a music council spokesperson thus informed me:

Since this government [Piñera], there has been a focus on the industry. What we want to do is to take musicians from the creation line and put them in the industry. So you motivate them to associate with other musicians, make a small record label and develop a catalog with more CDs and music. (Personal interview, Santiago, 5/22/13)

Of course, this renewed focus on directing public policy to help develop a local music 'industry' served the interests of those musicians already struggling to make their living playing and recording music. At the same time, it also rearticulated the official marginalization of musical projects with limited commercial appeal, including those more closely aligned with the country's penchant for the *vanguardaria*. A step in a positive direction by all accounts, this policy still represented a significant departure from the 'this disc is culture' stance associated with the country's leftist past (see chapter II). Consequently, for some factions, it left something to be desired.

¹⁵ Speaking generally in regards to national cultural policies and their tendency to favor professional development over amateur cultivation, musician/producer David Byrne states, "...for a very long time, the attitude of the state toward teaching and funding the arts has been in direct opposition to fostering creativity among the general population. It can seem that those in power don't want us to enjoy making things for ourselves – they'd prefer to establish a cultural hierarchy that devalues our amateur efforts and encourages consumption rather than creation" (2012:267).

Along with renewed government assistance, new platforms for the simple, affordable, and legal digital distribution of music have played a significant role in rejuvenating the local commercial music industry as well. The most notable among these online initiatives, Chile's Portaldisc.com deserves particular attention, as its story illustrates the catalytic effects of digital technology in transforming peripheral music industries like this.

In 2009, entrepreneur and local business owner Sebastian Milos had been moonlighting as the manager for the local rock band Difuntos Carrea. After achieving some commercial success earlier in the decade, the recent loss of a major label contract had forced Milos and the group to brainstorm new alternatives for the release of their third album. Milos envisioned an entirely online platform for the distribution of their music, although some band members remained reticent to altogether relinquish a physical component for the album. Hence, the collective compromised on a business plan that included the sale of 2½ x 2½ inch cards that included a sealed download code. These cards directed consumers to a dedicated website where they could use this code to download MP3 tracks of the group's music.

As Milos informed me, the basic problem Difuntos Carrea had been experiencing related to an inability to adequately supply the band's music to their fan base. This was particularly true for those fans residing outside Chile or in distant regions within the country. The download code offered a solution, since any fan with access to an Internet connection could purchase a code and access the music directly from the website, even without the exchange of the physical cards. Long-standing complications of physical transportation, storage, and commercial transfer of the musical commodity, which had

always been problematic for artists operating in the capitalist periphery, thus gave way to the immediacy of digital/online commercial exchange.

In the absence of local access to the burgeoning monolith of iTunes or any other variant in Chile, the idea proved influential.¹⁶ Other bands began contacting Milos for assistance in distributing their own music. With financial aid from a successful proposal to the aforementioned music fomentation fund (Fonmus) the platform developed rapidly into a larger initiative with a mission to disseminate the works of multiple artists.

Commencing in May of 2009 with the domain name Portaldisc.com, by July the site had already acquired 30 affiliated acts. By year's end, remarkably, there were a thousand.

Soon institutional labels like Alerce began contacting the organization about connecting their entire catalogs to the distribution site; and eventually, to Milos's considerable surprise, even institutional competitors like Feria Mix, an all-purpose music company that served as both a record label and a longstanding chain of brick and mortar music stores in Chile, offered their artists for online digital distribution through the site.¹⁷

With its meteoric rise, Portaldisc's trajectory thus paralleled an international wave of interest in promoting online music sales in the mid to late 00's, as pioneering musicians and entrepreneurs began to consider digital distribution as a potentially lucrative commercial opportunity rather than solely as the bane of an increasingly obsolete model of physical dissemination. Indeed, when I first interviewed Milos in December 2012, his organization had already established itself as a professional and highly recognizable institution in the Chilean music scene, with the digital albums of

¹⁶ The iTunes store would not become available to the Chilean public until December 2011.

¹⁷ Ironically, Feria Mix, due in large part to its overhead in housing and selling physical media, and also to declining interest in these forms of media, closed its doors in bankruptcy in 2014, another casualty of the digital revolution.

nearly every professionally oriented musical act in Chile available for purchase at the relatively affordable price of 3.000 pesos (about \$6-7 USD).¹⁸ At this time, Milos also shared his vision to further extend the company's operations beyond distribution in the near future, to concert organization, promotion, and radio and television programming, among other possibilities.



Fig. 3.4: The homepage of Portaldisc.com, announcing itself as “the largest portal for downloading Chilean Music,” with “more than 7000 albums available” (Screen shot taken on 12-9-2015).

In our conversations, Milos related another important perspective that elucidates perhaps the most commendable contribution offered by the Portaldisc initiative and the entire commercial music enterprise in contemporary Chile.¹⁹ While discussing the issue of piracy and its impact on his industry, the entrepreneur stated:

¹⁸ According to Milos in December 2012, Portaldisc was hosting about 3600 works. However, by December 2015, as indicated in the screenshot depicted above, this figure had already nearly doubled.

¹⁹ I must concede that even as Portaldisc continues to carve its niche in Chile’s resurgent commercial music market, the organization has developed some policies that seemingly extend beyond purely commercial ambition. Portaldisc, for instance, generally refuses to discriminate against *any* Chilean artist wishing to make their works available through the platform. Among the major artists, whose presence is clearly much more visible in the virtual imagery contained in the website itself, the site thus hosts the works of numerous unrecognizable artists as well - those who might only sell a few downloads, or none at all. Secondly, to its credit Portaldisc offers a limited quantity of specialty albums and singles for free (although, cynically, this may be viewed as much as an act of strategic marketing as it is an act of organizational altruism). And thirdly, as Milos himself pointed out, by systematically digitizing and making accessible works that have

[O]bviously if there was no illegal downloading it would be a thousand times better... What we want to demonstrate, because you can't combat it, [when you] offer services that are simple and cheap, many people will pay for music. Until now there was no alternative. Before you had to buy a physical disc or obtain a digital copy illegally.... What I've seen with Portaldisc, there's a motivation, people want to support the artists. Many people use Portaldisc because they know that the artists receive a significant portion of the payments. And the other motivation is that it's legal. Fundamentally, people don't like to do things that are illegal... Also people want to support the project and to support Chilean music. (Personal interview, Santiago, 12/4/12)

Interestingly, these observations seem to be substantiated by the results of a 2009 study concerning music consumption among Chile's youth. While 94.4% of the study's 485 participants claimed to obtain and listen to music on the Internet, and 87% claimed to acquire music for free, of the 22% who did say that they paid for music (at least some of the time), half cited supporting the artist as their primary motivation in doing so (Sintonia Joven 2009). Although the study predates the introduction of Portaldisc, the continued success and expansion of this platform, as well as the renewed success of many of the new independent artists coming up in this environment, suggest that as consumers witness the control of the industry resting more in local hands, and as they themselves feel more grassroots links to the products of this industry, they may well be willing to offer monetary contributions even as other alternatives remain available.

* * *

When I returned to Chile in September 2012 the political unrest from the previous year had calmed down to some extent. Yet, the reinvigorated music scene associated with Chile's "new paradise of pop," by contrast, continued its ascendancy. Along with the

long been out of print – like many originally released on the Alerce label, the organization provides a significant archival contribution to the preservation of Chile's musical heritage, and one that far outweighs the limited commercial potential of most of these forgotten historical releases.

government support and the Internet distribution possibilities referenced above, the radio channel Radio Uno, initiated in 2008 and dedicated solely to broadcasting *la musica chilena*, helped to solidify the sounds of the local scene in the public ear.²⁰ Social media networks buzzed with near constant updates regarding the status of local popular music recordings and appearances, as posted by affiliated labels, promotional teams, friends, and the artists themselves. Handbills advertising performances taking place in Santiago and its environs littered the city's walls, bus stops, and bulletin boards; and in relation to all this, many citizens conveyed enthusiasm with the state of recent musical culture.

As a rather enjoyable part of my investigations in Chile, I attended numerous events and performances that further affirmed the healthy state of the local commercial music industry. In early November 2012, I visited the third annual incarnation of the impressive three-day Pulsar festival, which brought together a series of performances, lectures, and booths filled with products and information related to local independent labels and other industry interests, all in the colossal, glass-enclosed former rail station now called the Central Cultural Estación Mapocho (see Fig. 3.5). Here, start-up labels like Quemascabeza, Tue Tue Discos, Algo Records, and many more pedaled CDs, books, LPs, and other merchandise associated with up-and-coming artists, while legacy imprints like Alerce, the semi-public labels Sello Azul and La Tienda Nacional, and the (now extinct) label/retail behemoth Feria Mix did much the same for more established acts. With its large and centrally located display, Portaldisc maintained a visible presence in this conference, offering free download cards and inviting visitors to browse their extensive catalog on large computer monitors. All the while, dozens of acts, ranging from

²⁰ To the general dismay of many popular musicians in Chile, as well as to many listeners, Radio Uno relinquished its frequency (97.1) at the end of 2015 (<http://www.emol.com/noticias/Espectaculos/2015/12/23/765182/Alberto-Plaza-y-cierre-Radio-Uno.html>).

the popular *cumbia* of Chico Trujillo to the singer-songwriter pop of Gepe and Camila Moreno, exchanged sets with veterans like Inti-Illimani and Isabel Parra on multiple stages situated throughout the venue.

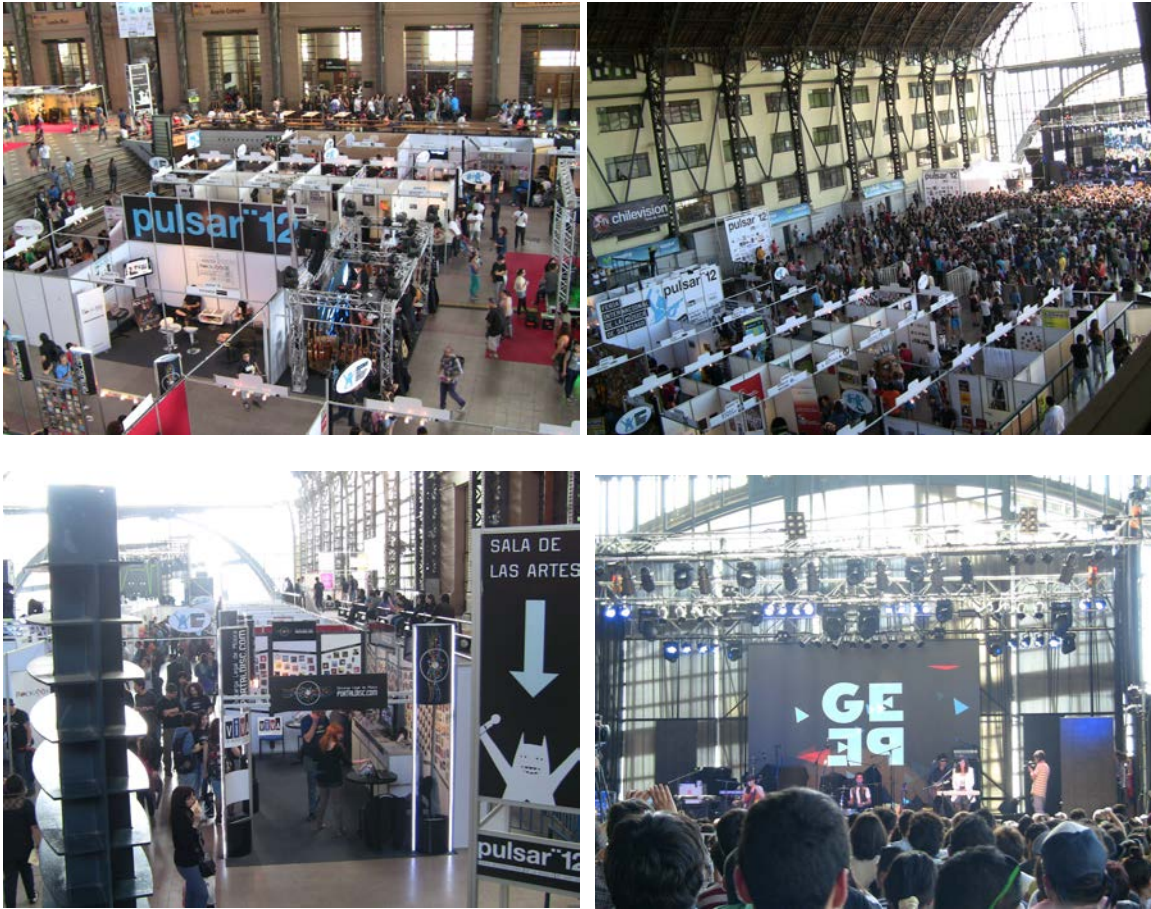


Fig. 3.5: Pulsar Festival 2012. (Clockwise from upper left) Vendor Booths, Pulsar main stage, Gepe in performance on Pulsar main stage, Portaldisc.com booth at Pulsar.

Curiously scheduled for the very same weekend as Pulsar, I also attended a major festival entitled *La Cumbre del Rock Chileno III: La Nueva Generación* (The Best of Chilean Rock III: The New Generation), hosted on an abandoned airfield on the outskirts of Santiago (see Fig. 3.6). This event similarly brought together dozens of local rock and pop acts (many of whom also played at Pulsar that weekend) in a surprisingly well-organized and well-executed two-stage Lollapalooza-style musical extravaganza.

Standouts included yet another set by Gepe, marked by his tasteful approach to folkloric-pop songwriting and his incorporation of elaborately adorned dance accompaniment, as well as a moving performance by the singer-songwriter Manuel Garcia, whose recent fusion of progressive rock arrangements with his *nueva canción*-reminiscent compositions presented a welcome update to a familiar musical trope. Capped with a collective homage to the Chilean rock pioneer and Los Prisioneros co-founder José Gonzales, almost all the afternoon/evening's 10+ hours of programming highlighted an eclectic popular music scene that exuded a high degree of professional competency and promise.



Fig. 3.6: La Cumbre del Rock Chileno III stage right, featuring folk rocker Fernando Milagos. (Photo by author)

While I was unable to attend the actual Lollapalooza festival the following May, which juxtaposed several Chilean artists with international superstars like Pearl Jam and the Black Keys, I did manage to attend the two-day Amplifica seminar later that same

week. This featured round-table discussions with the American and British organizers of the Lollapalooza event, along with dozens of other discussions and lectures, all dedicated to the subject of how best to promote and expand the economic viability of the Chilean music industry.²¹ Encapsulating the general tone of these conversations in a round-table devoted to “The Challenge of Conquering Latin America,” Camilia Saravia, manager for Chilean pop sensation Javiera Mena, stressed the importance of finding new ways to “monetize music” – since after all, while music may be an art form, “it’s also a business.”

Certainly, the creative, cultural, and logistical strides associated with Chile’s “new paradise of pop” deserve recognition – both in terms of their service to artists struggling justly to sustain themselves with their art, and to audiences who appreciate more professionalized modes of artistic presentation and organization. The current popularity and productivity of this local industry also confirms the continuing relevance, viability, and even dominance of its commercial logic. Still, for many of the more experimentally and/or ideologically inclined musicians who constitute my central research constituency, the “new paradise of pop” moniker often invokes either irrelevance or subtle ridicule. They believe this reinvigorated commercial music scene, on the one hand remains too tied to the well-worn conventions of the cosmopolitan pop aesthetic, and on the other hand, too caught up in the rejuvenated sense of “industry,” commodification, and celebrity stardom. As will be shown going forward, these artists interests aspire instead to the spirit of the Chilean *vanguardia*, as well as to the vintage,

²¹ José Orduña, another participant on the panel, walked this position back somewhat, noting that the important consideration is not to talk of whether music is a business or not but whether the artist has what they need to continue making music. Singer-songwriter Nano Stern, in turn, echoed Orduña’s point from the artist’s perspective, acknowledging that while the business end of the industry is necessary for a musician to create the “most beautiful” disc possible, it is also necessary “to create a secure place from which to create art.”

revolutionary notion that a recorded musical work can and perhaps should represent *la cultura popular*, without the potentially compromising influence of commercial interest. As a result of this stance, these artists have sought to manipulate many of the same social and technological conditions in order to achieve their own divergent artistic and social ends.

The Arrival of the Chilean Netlabel Movement

Musicians have seen in the new technologies a tool for distribution, which many times remained trapped in the bottleneck of the traditional labels.

- Claudio Ruíz, President of the Non-Governmental Chilean Organization Derechos Digitales²²

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to the origins and ideologies of the non-commercial netlabel movement. I seek to illuminate the social dynamics of this alternative model for music dissemination, as these dynamics, in turn, play a significant role in shaping the creative and cultural practices cultivated in their midst. As an inherently heterogeneous phenomenon that has grown to encompass tens of thousands of participants worldwide since the turn of the century, the transnational netlabel movement has arisen from equally diverse roots. Nevertheless, a few common factors have played particularly influential roles in determining its local development and expansion in Chile. These include a historical tendency toward artistic collectivism and collaboration in the region, a growing familiarity with and accessibility to Internet-related social media practices and digital media distribution technologies, and the realization of a technological synergy existing between these new media innovations and the computer based technologies involved in many forms of contemporary music gestation. Before

²² <http://www.lamusica.emol.com/detalle/index.asp?idnoticia=350348>

most musicians in the region even became aware of the possibility of forming or participating in a netlabel, these social and artistic inclinations were already converging in the early 00s, instinctively leading many towards the adoption of this new mode of music diffusion.²³ Furthermore, since a similar constellation of influences has shaped the appearance and evolution of the netlabel phenomenon as a whole, the consideration of these developments in Chile, while highlighting certain idiosyncrasies, should offer insight into the overarching nature of the transnational movement as well.

Artistic Collectivism

First of all, the formation of artistic collectives has long been a priority for Chilean musicians seeking to pool resources, fan bases, and contacts in order to overcome the many obstacles impeding artistic production in the region. In describing the origins of the local netlabel phenomenon, Mika Martini, director of the Pueblo Nuevo netlabel explains:

This activity was connected to a general idea in Chile, that you have to make a group in order to do things more easily. It's very difficult going solo, independent, to enter or engage the locale because what happens here in Chile is that the artists or the communities are very closed... If you want to be independent and you don't know anybody, you're not going to be able to participate. So, for this reason, we had to make our own collective, [and] this was one of the reasons for starting Pueblo Nuevo. (Personal interview, Santiago 10/22/12)

²³ It is important to point out that the local netlabel movement, which first appeared in 2004, actually predated the first appearances of the country's independent music breakthrough as the "new paradise of pop" by nearly half a decade. As such, several resonances of the noncommercial netlabel movement can be seen in its commercial independent counterpart, not the least of which relates to the success of artists like Gepe and Fakuta, who first released works through netlabels before transitioning to indie labels. In my conversations with Portaldisc's Sebastian Milos, he too noted that the example of Chile's Jacobino Discos netlabel, as an entirely non-physical music distribution platform, partially inspired his vision for Portaldisc.

Of course, this same impetus gave rise to the *peñas*²⁴ and to the communist-backed DICAP recording label of the 1960s (see chapter II). It similarly influenced the creation of the various commercial independent labels that have sprung up in the wake of the major label exodus of the 1990s. Still, for many small artistic collectives existing in Chile around the turn of the century, the Internet provided a distinct opportunity – an alternative to the commercial trajectory traced by many of these historical antecedents. As a result of this technological opening, many of these artistic collectives settled on the netlabel model as an efficient means to share the works of individual artists in the context of a wider community, whose combined efforts might generate more of an impact than the individual contributions of any one participant.

It is important to mention that while this new medium transformed and expanded these artistic collectives, it seldom created them where they did not already exist to some extent. In fact, all the musicians I interviewed who played a part in the early gestation of one of Chile's netlabels acknowledged some form of artistic collaboration and communalism that predated their organization's online presence.²⁵ This bears significance since the idiosyncratic social dynamics that preceded and inspired each netlabel's initial appearance typically influenced the aesthetic design as well as the governing practices of the netlabel itself.

While dozens of netlabels formed in Chile through the first decade of the new millennium, the diverse origins and motivations that characterize the movement as a

²⁴ A *peña* is an informal music performance space, often situated in a home or coffee shop. These spaces were instrumental in cultivating the *nueva canción* movement of the 1960s and also its successor *nuevo canto* during the dictatorship years.

²⁵ This scenario differs from the generalized characterization of a "netlabel's life cycle" given by Patryk Galuska (2012), in which he attributes the common origin of many netlabels as emerging from the initial efforts of a single music lover or artist. It is true, however, that over time much of the control and decision making for each of the labels highlighted in this dissertation eventually came to rest in the hands of one or two particularly dedicated individuals.

whole may still be seen in the particular circumstances that gave rise to the three netlabels central to this ethnography. Jacobino Discos, for instance, emerged in 2004 as one of Chile's first netlabels through the collective efforts of a group of college friends and musical acquaintances living in and around Santiago's San Miguel district.²⁶ In many ways revolving around the spirited and deeply creative personality of musician and producer Pablo Flores (a.k.a. Namm), the nucleus of this organization included several musicians (Sebastian Sampieri, Ignacio Morales, and Papas Fritas) who performed and recorded together in a variety of concerted musical endeavors for years before organizing themselves as a netlabel. Often recording and/or collaboratively mixing their eclectic works in Flores's home studio, these musicians' efforts at self-promotion began with the independent production and distribution of CDs in the late 90s and early 00s. The early impulse to form an online initiative for these purposes subsequently took shape rather intuitively, as these artists recognized in the Internet a far more efficient means to publically showcase their works collectively.

Since friendship and mutual admiration determined early inclusion in this collective more than any strict adherence to a shared musical genre, their early musical output ranged wildly, encompassing everything from the sample-based EDM²⁷ of Fernando Mora (a.k.a. Augias Amenas) to the neo-folkloric songwriting of Chilean popular music star, Gepe. Through more than a decade of evolution, however, the label's catalog has continued to expand with eclectic contributions from several additional participants, many of whom live in distant parts of Chile or in foreign locales, and who only first encountered the collective online.

²⁶ This region has a rich history of incubating Chile's more vanguard musical tendencies (See Tironi 2007).

²⁷ Electronic Dance Music



Fig. 3.7: Jacobino Discos discography page (Jacobinodiscos.cl screenshot taken 1-18-16)

Pueblo Nuevo, which now constitutes the most active and lauded of Chile's netlabels, arose from its own network of collaboration and musical camaraderie in 2005. Unlike its predecessor Jacobino, at its inception this label was associated less with a long-standing group of friends, and more with what was at the time a recently established network of musicians drawn to similar styles of music and common forms of music technology. This network coalesced around a series of gatherings known as the *Taller Electro* (Electronic Workshop), which electroacoustic composer and educator Federico Schumacher initiated in 2004 to bring together academically trained electroacoustic composers and more popularly situated electronica and DJ artists in the spirit of mutual appreciation and understanding.²⁸ In these sessions artists discussed and demonstrated their works as they attempted to familiarize one another with the aesthetics and technologies associated with their respective fields. Yet, Schumacher soon recognized

²⁸ *Taller Electro* itself grew out of a lecture and discussion session led by Federico Schumacher in 2004 at one of the earliest manifestations of the Chilean electroacoustic music festival Ai-Maako.

this convergence as more than just an occasion for informative artistic exchange. As he related:

At the first moment we found we had two common points. First, we all love sound. Second, we use almost the same tools, even if we make different music. So ... we made some meetings to share information and softwares. And after that we created this *Taller Electro* with the idea of sharing not only experience but also to try to do something musically. (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/17/13)

Mika Martini, whose own musical background to this point had revolved around more experimental expressions of rock and electronica, also recalled:

It was there that I first learned about [the electroacoustic community]. With this group, the *Taller Electro*, many stories began, many composers [got their start]. And later Federico proposed the idea of Pueblo Nuevo. He proposed this marvelous idea to release electroacoustic discs. It was through this relation with them [that the netlabel formed]. (Personal interview, Santiago, 10/22/12)

Informed and inspired by the example set by Jacobino Discos, Martini and Pueblo Nuevo co-founder Daniel Jeffs (DJeff) provided the technical expertise and initiative necessary to realize Schumacher's vision in the form of a netlabel with the capacity to publicly showcase the works created by this cross-genre electronic music community. In its earliest phases the aesthetics and practices of the organization closely mirrored the intentions and membership of the *Taller Electro*, with contributions that bridged the gap between abstract electroacoustic compositions and more rhythmically oriented, minimalist electronica. Further underscoring the sense of collaboration present from its earliest stages of this organization, Martini also related that, "Something interesting happened at the beginning. Almost every person that arrived, apart from being a musician and bringing their music, contributed their knowledge or their abilities" (Ibid.). Some offered communication skills, while others provided expertise in mastering, concert organizing, or technical engineering, among other things. Martini himself contributed his

services as a graphic designer, developing the layout of the website and much of the ‘cover’ art for the label’s numerous musical releases. As he emphasized, moreover, “All these collaborations, all these works, were done without any type of payment in money” (Ibid.).

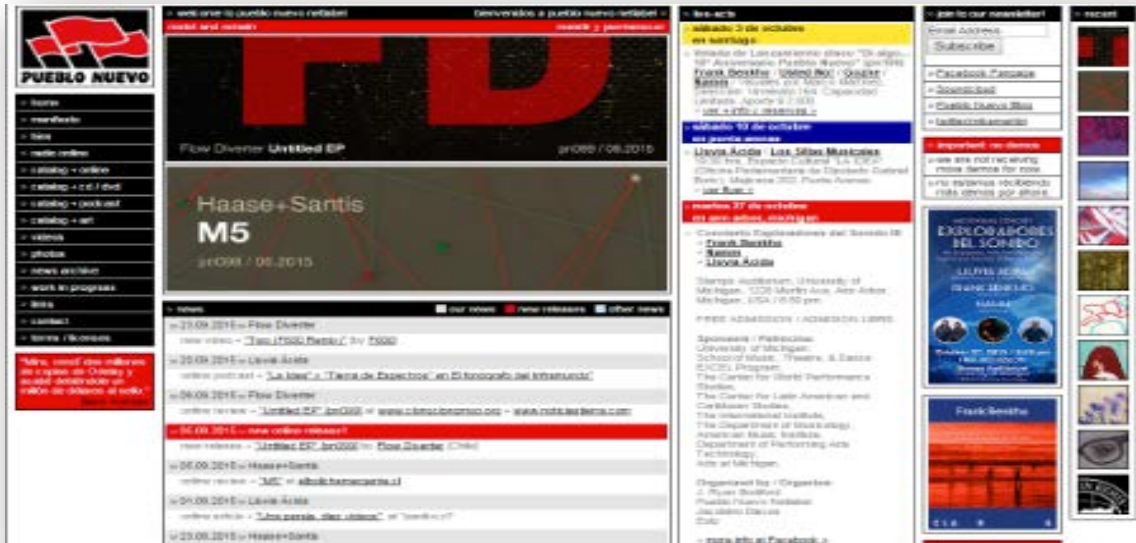


Fig. 3.8: Pueblo Nuevo homepage (pueblonuevo.cl screenshot 1/19/16)

Arriving to the scene somewhat later, the Michita Rex collective similarly grew out of a series of interpersonal interactions that expanded into the virtual sphere in 2010. In this case, the core group congealed largely through mutual participation in a circuit of experimental pop concerts, and realized in underground Santiago establishments like the dark and claustrophobic performance space, Bar Uno.²⁹ According to singer, songwriter, and producer Pamela Sepúlveda (a.k.a. Fakuta), who co-founded the label and later emerged as one of its most celebrated artists, this performance network gave rise to a

²⁹ Located on the outskirts of the Bellavista nightclub/tourist district at the base of San Cristobal hilltop near the center of the city, this bar is a most unlikely venue for musical performances. Nevertheless, this space, which altogether is hardly larger than an average-sized living room, has for several years been a formative site for Santiago’s more experimental musical offerings.

series of collaborative projects involving female artists like Danae Morales, Andrea Roca, and Dadalu.³⁰ Through these collaborative interactions, these women arrived at what Sepúlveda ironically describes as, “the nonsense idea of doing a label that was only for releasing singles and from girls... like singer girls, or music made by girls” (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/10/13).³¹

Along with developing an audience base for the digital consumption of their recordings, the relationships formed through mutual performance in these circuits helped solidify the more song-oriented, electro-pop artistic projects that eventually characterized much of Michita’s online presence as a netlabel.³² They also helped to foster this netlabel in particular as medium for audio/visual performance, as several artists used the platform to not only share musical recordings but also to broadcast highly stylized audio/video productions. Furthermore, outlining the aesthetic and posture of Michita Rex, as well as this connection to a previously existing collective, co-founder Danae Morales stated:

What we represent is like a manner of making music, which we have been doing for the last ten years, that is a scene of independent Chilean pop... with distinct versions: electronica, more naive, more dark, more retro, more friendly - distinct versions of pop. But for us its independent pop, we follow our own interests, its independent in the economic sense, in the creative sense, we are people that have been making music for a long time, and so its a scene that came from before. (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/18/13)

³⁰ Along with assisting one another in recording and performing solo projects, these women participated in varying combinations in projects like The Golden Baba, World Music, and the experimental noise collective Banco Mundial, each of which eventually released recording through Michita Rex.

³¹ Michita Rex did eventually expand its horizons to include several male artists as well; however, as both Sepúlveda and Morales described it, many of these male participants still demonstrated some feminine sensibility in their musical contributions.

³² These offline social exchanges also cultivated significant collaborative links between the Michita collective and those associated with Pueblo Nuevo, Jacobino, and other netlabels, since artists affiliated with all these labels often performed in the same underground circuits. As will be examined further in the following chapter, these links would eventually highlight the uniquely collaborative nature of the netlabel phenomenon as a whole, as artists affiliated with each of these labels often submitted works or contributed to compilation projects associated with the other organizations.

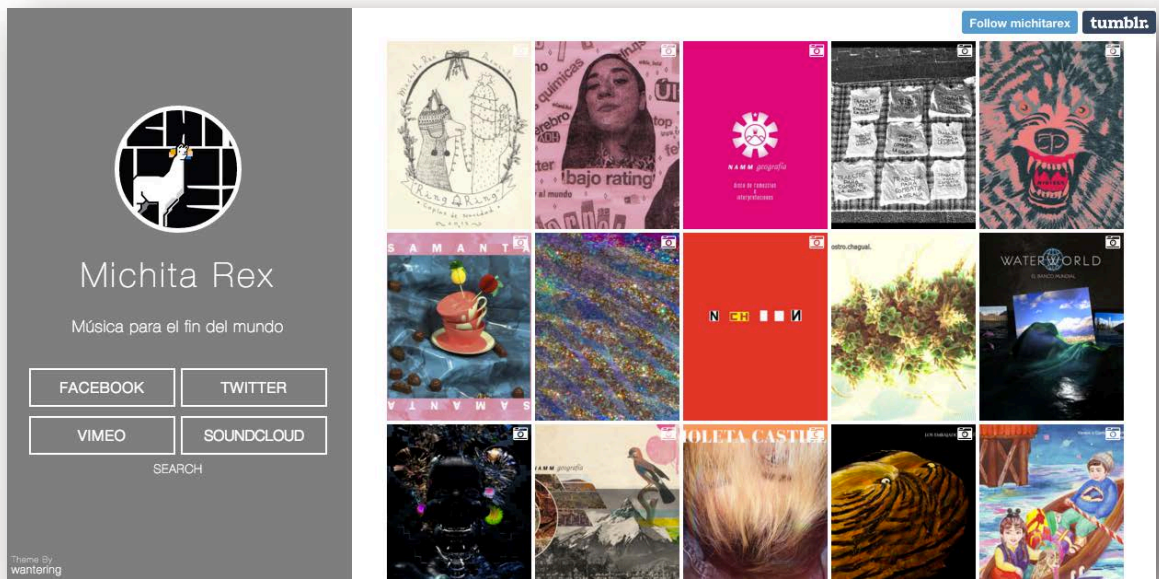


Fig. 3.9: Michita Rex homepage (michitarex.tumblr.com screenshot 1-19-16)

Among the many Chilean netlabels that remain ancillary to the present ethnography,³³ the Valparaíso-based netlabel Epa Sonidos also deserves special mention, both because its presence on the national scene remains considerable, and because it exemplifies two additional links between collectivism and netlabel participation in Chile. On the one hand, this organization represents the most prominent example of a Chilean musical collective that adopted the non-commercial netlabel model *after* previously operating as a traditional independent label for a few years.³⁴ On the other, it exemplifies the growing interest in netlabels centered *outside* Santiago over the course of the 00s – a

³³ Other particularly notable netlabels to emerge on the Chilean scene between 2004 and 2010 include Impar (EDM), Modismo (Hip-Hop), 001 Records (Experimentalism), all based in Santiago.

³⁴ “Driven by the necessity to catalog and self-diffuse its musical and audio-visual projects” (www.epasonidos.cl), this cohort of electronic music artists, led by brothers André and Felipe Baradit and Miguel Jáuregui, established Epa Sonidos in 2001 as an indie label to help distribute their CDs, organize performances, and produce specialized radio broadcasts in the coastal region. They abandoned the traditional indie model in 2007, opting instead to adopt the netlabel ethos and upload their entire catalog on their website for free download. Their trajectory is similar to that of other organizations that converted into netlabels after failing to take flight as commercial endeavors, due in large part to the amount of energy and capital necessary to create and distribute physical CDs, and the fact that “piracy of CDs was so severe they couldn’t survive” as such (Martini, Personal interview, Santiago 10/22/2012).

phenomenon that has helped to instill a sense of regional variety within the larger national trend.

Peer-to-peer Music Distribution and Social Media Networks

Along with the more historically situated penchant for artistic collectivism in Chile, two 21st-century media trends have been especially influential in helping to determine the evolution of the local netlabel movement. The first involved a certain social conditioning, encouraged in large part by online, peer-to-peer music sharing networks like Napster, which introduced nearly limitless consumer access to musical recordings *sans* commerce or payment. The second related to early social networking sites like Myspace, which combined the potential of free online music exposure and consumption with that of personalized artistic demonstration, self-promotion, and social interaction.

Concerning the former of these two influences, Jacobino Discos co-founder Pablo Flores described how prior experience with peer-to-peer file sharing shaped the direction and design of his label:

Everyone [affiliated with the label in its early stages] really did know Napster, and then Audiogalaxy, we really knew how the MP3 thing worked and we really appreciated the MP3 thing in that period... But we began with pirating even before in the 90s, from 1995-2000, before Audiogalaxy and Napster. We went to the flea market ... and bought pirate cassettes... From the beginning we knew the way to get commercial music for free. And yes, I think that gave us the way, the business model, to give the music for free ... maybe in a subconscious way, we thought that was the way (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/13/13).

While Flores's comments confirm the entrenched presence of piracy in the social evolution of music dissemination in Chile, his statements highlight the influence of MP3 technology and the corresponding peer-to-peer file sharing networks, which exploded the

potential for this activity in Chile.³⁵ This loosening of the once firm and technologically reinforced link between musical exchange and commercial exchange is also intriguing since it seems to have embedded itself in many MP3 file sharers' views toward both musical consumption and the dissemination of their own musical productions. As Flores explains, at least among his cohort of musicians, the experience of *obtaining* music for free through sites like Napster and Audiogalaxy influenced their decision to *share* original music in a similar vein.

This perspective played a determinant role in shaping the design and implementation of the netlabel media platform, although non-commercial file sharing was not the only 21st-century development to impact this phenomenon. While peer-to-peer file sharing networks proved to be an efficient, if short lived, opportunity for acquiring well-known commercial music recordings without cost (or permission), they were an ineffectual means for up-and-coming or amateur artists to publically distribute their own works – even if they were open to the possibility of sharing these works without monetary gain. The peer-to-peer model centered on a search engine that allowed the consumer to request and access the musical files they wanted from those hard drives linked into the system that already contained the desired tracks. However, since a consumer cannot search for that which he or she does not already know exists, it served almost no function as a promotional tool – that is, except when accompanied by some means of external recommendation.

³⁵ Michita Rex's Fakuta echoed this sentiment, "I always think of Chile like a pirate fort or something. We are so used to doing illegal copies of everything, of movies, of CDs, because also for us it's really expensive to reproduce musical copies . . . But also because we are really always downloading things from the Internet. There is no police above us; there is no FBI" (Personal interview, Santiago 4/10/13).

However, social networking sites, which also began to appear in the early 00s, soon provided this function. First arriving in 2003, MySpace quickly became the most significant among these new online social venues by allowing its users the opportunity to not only consume online media, but to easily generate and share it as well. The site enabled millions of participants to create a personalized online web space and to connect this space with those belonging to countless other friends and virtual acquaintances. It particularly endeared itself to amateur music producers and aficionados by providing specialized pages for musicians to upload and broadcast a limited selection of their own MP3-encoded recordings at no cost to either the artist or the appreciator. MySpace thus opened doors for individual musicians and musical acts to engage virtual networks and to instantaneously share their music with a potentially expansive audience. Indeed, Michita Rex's Fakuta cites "taking advantage of MySpace," as a means to cement local relationships and attract attention from further afield. In relating her early experiences utilizing the site with her experimental side project Banco Mundial (World Bank), she explains, "We were making all this music with no intention of getting anywhere." Nevertheless, through MySpace, "We made a lot of contacts and I think in that moment there was a first approach from the outside, I mean people from the U.S. and Australia were talking about music that was made in Chile!" (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/10/13).

Like Napster, MySpace presented its own limitations. Unlike Napster, for instance, in its early stages the platform offered no means for fans to download music

from the site for offline and/or personalized listening purposes.³⁶ The site also initially limited artists to streaming up to five more or less radio-length tracks – hardly enough bandwidth to present a single album length work, let alone an artist’s entire catalog.³⁷ Hence, while MySpace enabled artists to connect their individualized pages to a network of other artists, it still left it to the artists themselves to attract online attention through their own efforts. Along with its other drawbacks, moreover, MySpace’s technological conventions could not satisfy the artistic necessity to sustain and engage the public as a *collective* – which, as explained above, was so utterly important in a region like Chile.

In relation to both the promising and problematic innovations associated with these disparate online trends, the netlabel model thus evolved as a logical reconfiguration. Familiarity with peer-to-peer file sharing networks inspired early protagonists to seize on the immediate online transferability of the MP3 file, and to make the most of a deepening public affinity for “free” music consumption. Engagement with the social networking phenomenon presented its own templates for personalized online media production and artistic exchange. These trends then merged with the long-established inclination for artistic collectivism, as countless musicians recognized in the Internet the potential to expand artistic relationships in a way that circumnavigated industry control.

As a final point, it is interesting to note that the logic of this model seems to have taken root in Chile rather spontaneously and separately before the trend became an

³⁶ For instance, one could not burn a CD, or create a customized playlist with these streaming tracks. Also, while the option to purchase tracks did become available later, the possibility for artists to offer their tracks to download without cost did not.

³⁷ An artist could, of course, link their MySpace page to a personal webpage where they could conceivably upload as much music as he or she wished. However, this option would likely entail personal expense, as well as additional technical expertise.

influential movement with its own recognizable definitions and dimensions. As Jacobino Disco's Pablo Flores relates:

When we created Jacobino, we really didn't know about netlabels. We didn't know that [other] netlabels existed. We discovered netlabels later, in 2006, maybe two years after we started with Jacobino Discos . . . I think we discovered the netlabel [phenomenon] more when we discovered achive.org, and at that point we knew . . . and with Creative Commons (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/13/13).

A trend took hold only after the early examples of Jacobino and Pueblo Nuevo started to resonate in the Chilean music scene, as other local collectives followed suit.³⁸

Remarkably, Pablo Flores also notes that it was years later before the affiliates of these organizations recognized their initiatives as part of a still larger transnational phenomenon, with which they might actively network and meaningfully collaborate (see also chapter VI).

Technological Synergy

Despite its nebulous beginnings, by the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the adoption of the non-commercial netlabel model had evolved into a recognizable and influential movement, both in Chile and elsewhere. According to sociologist Felipe Espinosa's 2011 analysis of the Chilean music industry, by 2010 nearly half (48%) of the bands, musicians, and musical projects registered in Chile were

³⁸ In Chile alone, at least one other similar though separate online venture emerged somewhat concurrently with Jacobino Discos in 2004. This initiative, called Impar, technically appeared as the first of the new breed of non-commercial online music distribution services that would later come to identify themselves as part of a broader 'netlabel' movement. Comprising Daniel Nieto (Danieto), Hans Carstens, Claudio Cisterna (Flipper), and Jessica Campos de la Paz (Alisu), this collective successfully appealed to Chile's Fondart fund to launch their vision of a website for the free distribution of their own MP3-encoded electronic music files. However, Nieto explained that the organization's early years were actually hampered by the dictates of its own Fondart funding proposal. Having defined the project as inclusive of only its founding four members, IMPAR was prevented from allowing additional musicians to join the initiative for its first two years, which corresponded to the period of Fondart support. During this time much of the interest and additional talent associated with the Chilean electronic music community gravitated to Pueblo Nuevo, despite the fact that the latter initiative actually formed in part as response to Impar's early example (Daniel Nieto, Personal interview, Santiago, 4/29/13).

affiliated with a netlabel,³⁹ with the other half generally gravitating to one of the country's more commercially oriented independent labels (2011:139).

To this day, the distinctions between the motivations and musical practices associated with these two fields defy any neat or definitive categorization. The boundaries remain porous, as acts and practices cross from one field to the other, and significant diversity exists even within the two contexts. However, Espinosa's analysis on this duality in the Chilean music scene does attempt to identify some broad characteristics that differentiate the netlabels from the 'indies.' As he explains:

[In the netlabel context] the form that the musical production acquires combines lone creative processes, remixes, and collaborations, in a manner that transforms the very nature of the musical products, which tend to appear and disappear. It also utilizes creative elements of a distinct nature (like audiovisuals) to generate innovative offerings. (Ibid.)

While these cursory observations generally ring true, Espinosa skirts a larger question concerning the underlying reasons *why* these 'distinct' types of musical practices tend to associate with this medium rather than any other. One answer to this question relates to the fact that an overwhelming percentage of these "lone creative processes," remixes, and audiovisual tendencies often involve similar personal computer technologies, which artists use to independently record, edit, and digitally manipulate their audio productions. These works are realized without the aid of professional recording studios, and in many cases without the need for the artist to leave his or her home. Consequently, there exists an important correlation between the tools used to create this music and those that access and manipulate the medium itself.

³⁹ In addition to the netlabels referenced above Espinosa also identifies IMPAR, No Mucho, Paranoia, and Glued (2011:139).

This correspondence resonates especially with the electronic, electroacoustic, and electro-pop musical genres that constitute much of the music released through netlabels. Indeed, even as online distribution increasingly displaces the physical distribution of all genres of music in the digital era, composer Kim Cascone observes an especially “logical” relationship uniting electronic music and electronic distribution via the Internet (2000:16). As he explains, the fact that the personal computer is now “the primary tool for creating and performing electronic music,” underscores a deeply synergistic connection, wherein, for the first time in history, a technology of musical creation correlates directly with the technologies incorporated for its own mass-dissemination and consumption (Ibid.). Furthermore, artists often transfer and acquire the actual software technologies used in the production of this music through the same online media used to share the end product, while the same holds true for many of the sampled sound fragments incorporated into its creation.

The significance of this creative and distributive synergy is not lost on the participants of the more electronic-music-oriented netlabels either. Many reference this technological ebb and flow as a contributing factor in defining their personal and/or collective artistic agendas. For example, Pueblo Nuevo’s online profile explains how, “In its quality as a net-label,” this organization, “has approached a manner of producing and distributing music in plain agreement with the modus operandi that are presently available” (www.pueblonuevo.cl). Yet, just as the netlabel medium is not limited to electronic music, neither does this technological parallel between the means of artistic production and the means of dissemination correlate solely within this stylistic field. Rather, this sense of productive/distributive logic or synergy relates more directly to an

independent style of musical creation that incorporates personal computer technologies regardless of whether or not the end product reveals its reliance on electronic production software. The singer-songwriter who records him or herself in a home studio with little outside investment or intervention, may be just as inclined to freely share this work via the Internet as any electronic musician. Indeed, the catalogs of Chilean netlabels like Jacobino Disco and Michita Rex in particular exemplify this tendency, as they juxtapose experimental and/or electronic music submissions with more acoustically rendered, song-based compositions, captured in home-based audio recording sessions.⁴⁰

Likewise, the technological processes involved in making music in this way draw direct parallels to the attending economic model associated with netlabel distribution. The process of self-recording and production, combined with the lack of any production or distribution costs associated with developing a physical product, equates to a mode of musical creation that often involves very limited monetary investment on the artist's behalf.⁴¹ And as Chris Anderson observes in *Free: The Future of Radical Price* (2009), when the actual production costs associated with recording and editing music become nominal to essentially nothing, it may simply be more practical, and perhaps even more beneficial, for musicians to share these recordings freely than to attempt to sell them.⁴²

This is not to say that when musical recordings are created without significant monetary investment that they do not or should not accrue monetary exchange value. The sheer creative efforts of professionally-oriented composers working in the digital domain

⁴⁰ The same holds true for rap artists as well. In fact, Pueblo Nuevo has released a handful of albums that feature this genre.

⁴¹ That is, of course, after the initial costs of acquiring a computer, production software (if this is bought rather than pirated), microphones, etc.

⁴² Anderson suggests that even for more professionally oriented musicians the free distribution of musical recordings may also serve more efficiently as a promotional tool for performances, merchandise, and other forms of revenue than as a commodity in its own right.

may justify a request for fair compensation just as they do for any other professionals working in digital content production. However, as Anderson also suggests, for those artists for whom music was never intended to be a moneymaking business, and for whom music is “something they do for other reasons, from fun to creative expression,” the option to efficiently and collectively release music without the need to engage in the additional complications of commerce may be seen as more of a liberating opportunity than a burden (Ibid.:29). Musicologist Mark Katz echoes this sentiment, when he states, “If as a musician it is more important to be heard, then free is the obvious choice” (2010:207). Yet still, one must remember that this choice has only become obvious in relation to a new technological paradigm where production investments are limited, and where distribution costs may be nothing at all.

A final revealing aside provides further insight on exactly this question, albeit from the opposite perspective. In reflecting on her experience with the netlabel model, Michita Rex’s Fakuta relates:

Michita Rex was about trying to show the world that there were interesting projects [that did not relate to] commercial music. That was it. We copied the idea of Pueblo Nuevo and Jacobino that had a page where they can upload records. They were our clear inspirations; they were the first ones to do it. And I think the difference of Michita Rex that we didn't think about it when we did it, but after people told me, ‘well you're spending more money because it's not electronic music, pure electronic music, maybe there are bands that you need to record a drum set and things like that that, take more time and its more expensive in the end, and you're like giving it away anyway.’ (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/10/13)

These comments acknowledge a certain disjuncture between some of the artistic practices affiliated with the Michita collective and this collective’s chosen mode of

dissemination.⁴³ In this context, musical production costs *did* occasionally involve paying for professional expertise and studio time, and this meant that free distribution resulted in a net financial loss for some of these musicians. Given this circumstance, it is therefore not surprising that among the central netlabels included in this study, Michita was the first to fold.⁴⁴

Netlabel Ideology

There appears to be no real or powerfully imagined “outside” to capitalism now, and where oppositional space is to be found, or how it is to be constructed within a global economy, is perhaps the most important fin-de-siecle question for left-liberal thought.

- George Marcus (1996:6)

Over and over again our spirit struggles and deceives the wall of silence and omission, reemerging unrecognizable, wearing new costumes and disguises, just like Manuel Rodriguez cheating the oppressor,⁴⁵ we stand up to make ourselves heard...

...Here today, our claim for freedom, harmony and brotherhood, from Latin America to the world.

- Excerpts of Pueblo Nuevo Manifesto
(www.pueblonuevo.cl)

⁴³ Mika Martini also recognizes a possible disjuncture between the means of production and diffusion. In considering why netlabels are associated less with releasing genres like punk, metal, reggae, and rock, he relates, “I suppose it is because it is more difficult to record a band with various members. You need a studio, with mixing and mastering expertise, and all this before you can offer a quality production” (Panoramico Subteranea 2002).

⁴⁴ The activity on the label’s website ceased after September 2013, the date of its final release. Its website disappeared altogether in November 2014, due to a failure to pay server costs. This occurred as many of the label’s artists, including Fakuta, crossed over to traditional indie labels in the hopes of acquiring more logistical and financial support for their increasingly professionalized musical careers. In foreshadowing this transition for the Michita collective, Fakuta stated earlier in 2013: “So we are in another era now, and I don’t know how we are going to face that . . . For me, its not making so much sense now to give away music. One [reason] is that when I make a record I spend a lot of money; I invest a lot of money in doing it. And that money didn’t come back in any way, even [when I produce] physical copies, it’s really for diffusion; you give it away anyway. So it’s really great to have the opportunity to have the experience of doing that, but now I think . . . Well talking to other friends from Michita, its also how everyone feels, like you worked a lot in something, the productions are every time more complicated, more sophisticated” (Personal interview, Santiago 4/10/13).

⁴⁵ Manuel Rodriguez was a key revolutionary figure in Chile’s independence movement. He has since acquired a near-mythic reputation as a trickster, intent on undermining oppression through subversion and subterfuge.

Though the netlabel distribution model emerged partly as a response to practical considerations, for many adherents the netlabel movement offers more than practical benefits. Either for its potential to satisfy certain communal, political, or purely creative motivations, or through some combination of these sensibilities, affiliation with these networks commonly sustains deep personal and social resonances for those who choose to participate as artists and citizens. Thus, before delving into the actual techniques and expressions that characterize artistic activity in the chapters that follow, I conclude the present chapter by considering some of the philosophical and ideological propensities that connect this phenomenon to the history of leftist artistic activity and social activism in Chile – as referenced in previous chapters – and to the still larger Free Culture and Creative Commons movements currently unfolding around the world.

To begin, it would be incorrect to assume that all musical distribution that does not involve some form of commerce or cost somehow reflects an inherently ideological, or even anti-capitalistic, proclivity. As mentioned in the previous section, Chris Anderson's work (2009), among others (Kot 2009, Katz 2010), suggests the free distribution of digital music may serve as a significant marketing strategy for artists pursuing other revenue streams. Additionally, this practice may represent a simple necessity for amateur artists who wish to publically demonstrate their recorded musical expressions, but who, for whatever reason, simply cannot sell this work in any context.⁴⁶

It would also be incorrect to assume that all music distributed in this manner actually harbors some as-yet-unrealized, ulterior commercial intention, or that music

⁴⁶ Michita Rex's Fakuta seems to confirm this reality as a partially motivating factor for her netlabel's early activities. She states, "When net labels appeared in 2003 or 2007 something like that, [there was] a big need to place the music for free download, because in Chile, people weren't paying attention to music that was made in Chile. So the only way for us was like 'take it, it's for free' you're not spending anything on this" (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/10/13).

distributed without cost is always done so necessarily because it holds no potential for commercial gain.⁴⁷ Free may very well be “a desperate option when there is no other real alternative,” as Portaldisc’s Sebastian Milos suggested. Yet, even this skeptic of netlabel diffusion acknowledged that in certain circumstances, this practice might also reflect, “an act of rebellion,” often against the very systems and conventions that deny these alternatives in the first place (Personal interview, Santiago, 12/4/12).

A few important considerations bolster the latter view. For instance, it may be conceded that much of the music released through netlabels exhibits a degree of vanguard experimentalism that makes it hard to imagine any scenario where these productions might sustain commercial viability. Yet, one must bear in mind that the creative decision to pursue these forms of musical expression, rather than attempting to conform to some preconceived popular conventions, already reveals an ideological willingness to place artistic ends above commercial and/or professional ambitions.⁴⁸

Additionally, among netlabel catalogs, in Chile and elsewhere, there are many musical works that do reflect more popularly oriented aesthetic sensibilities. In different circumstances many of these productions might actually enjoy considerable success in the commercial circles of popular music. Yet, despite this potential, their creators choose to distance their works from these markets, often without any apparent intentions other than the conviction to collectively participate in a movement that stands in conscious opposition to the traditional music industry and all that it represents to these artists.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ These were the assumptions of a Ministry of Culture official, who, when questioned about the netlabel phenomenon in Chile, seemed to find it difficult to believe that any musician would ever want to offer their work for free if a viable commercial alternative existed (Personal interview, Santiago, 5/22/13).

⁴⁸ In this way, this artistic penchant dates back at least to the Dadists, whose creative expressions, “sacrificed market values . . . through the conscious use of the unmarketable” (Ballantine 1984:114).

⁴⁹ For example, Pablo Flores’s electro-pop group Namm released a highly acclaimed album called *Geographia* through Michita Rex in 2012 that in my view stands among the best work produced by any

To clarify these postures I often questioned my correspondents about their motivations for distributing music in this context. As a musician and composer, for whom professional ambitions once played a significant motivating influence, I inquired if similar visions ever influenced these creative practitioners in their formative years. I also asked if they *ever* perceived music as a potentially commercial endeavor. Tellingly, many responded, “no,” while some participants emphasized this response with some variant of the “my music is not a business” refrain.

Admittedly, some of these same netlabel participants softened this stance by acknowledging that, due to the historically underdeveloped music industry, this path never seemed viable in Chile anyway.⁵⁰ However, further discussions and analysis also revealed two principles that underscore an ideological commitment to non-commercial music distribution that, in turn, links this activity to certain cultural values and historical precedents in Chile (see chapter II). One relates to a sense of democratic and participatory conviviality – the notion that cultural expression and exchange emerge from social relationships and, as such, should aspire to contribute first and foremost to the greater good of society, rather than to that of the individual creator. The other draws parallels to the first, but adds a dimension of political commitment that sees in music an agent of social and political change, especially as this relates to the values and ideals of Chilean socialism.

musical artists currently releasing music as part of Chile’s recent popular music renaissance. Los Embajadores, who also released their debut album *Faisanes* through Michita Rex in 2012, were similarly remarkable before eventually dissolving as a group later that same year.

⁵⁰ Unlike in North America or Europe where visions of rock or pop stardom have propelled the creative interests of countless young musicians for decades, Fakuta, for one, acknowledges a general understanding, shared by many in the region, that, “because you live in Chile, you can’t be rock star” (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/10/13).

Democratic Conviviality

An example of the first of these two commitments may be seen in the creative lives and work of self-proclaimed “citizen musicians,” Héctor Aguilar and Rafael Cheuquelaf, who together constitute the Punta Arenas-based electronic music duo Lluvia Acida – one of Chile’s most prominent and prolific netlabel acts.⁵¹ Citing friendships and even collaborative relationships with some of Chile’s most commercially successful acts, these artists made it clear that they do not negate the cultural value of the more market-oriented musical endeavors springing forth from the region. Nevertheless, they asserted, “another sensibility exists in Chile,” in contrast and addition to the inclination to commercialize art. Although Aguilar and Cheuquelaf pointed to historical examples like the socially committed Chilean recording labels DICAP and Alerce to support this view, an equally convincing example may be seen in their own story. As they explained, making a living through music or even supplementing their incomes never represented a dream let alone the practical objective for their creative practice, despite the central role that music plays in their lives. Instead, they cited “sharing culture” and helping to instill “conviviencia,” or conviviality, among their local community and in the country as primary creative concerns (Personal interviews, Santiago, 11/3/12, and Punta Arenas, 4/13/13).

With a career spanning two decades together and encompassing 26 album length releases (with many released through Pueblo Nuevo), the creative efforts of these audio-visual artists remain particularly rooted in the unique culture, landscape, and history of the Southern Patagonian region where they continue to work and reside. Their extraordinary output also demonstrates a commitment to local community involvement

⁵¹ Punta Arenas is located at the southern-most tip of Chile’s continental territory.

and social advocacy that surpasses that of most other acts distributing works through the netlabel context.⁵² Indeed, to cite a few notable examples: in 2007, the duo released *La Idea: Canto a la Federación Obrera de Magallanes*, a work that documented in cantata-like fashion the contentious history of Southern Patagonia's union movement. In 2009 came *Kuluana*, a collaboration that featured Ursula Calderon, one of the last speakers of the indigenous Yagan language, who told stories in her native tongue as Lluvia Acida provided electronic music accompaniment. In 2013, the group released *Insula in Albis*, an enchanting album and video documentary project that recounted their Chilean government-sponsored trip to Antarctica to collect audio and visual samples of life on the frozen continent (see Fig. 3.10).⁵³

As exhibited in all of these projects (and many more), Aguilar and Chuequelaf's community-focused creative endeavors commonly extend beyond music making and into the territories of citizen anthropology, historical documentation, exploration, and social activism.⁵⁴ Yet, even as Lluvia Acida point to Patagonian values as an inspiration for these socially committed practices, conversations with several other netlabel participants, along with a larger historical view of Chilean cultural movements, suggest the societal values attributed to non-commercial, 'convivial' cultural exchange has a much broader base in the region.⁵⁵

⁵² When I visited Punta Arenas in April 2013, Chuequelaf explained to me that local customs dictated, "guests should not have to pay for anything, the tourists can pay." This social convention was certainly upheld by the tremendous generosity that these musicians and their families extended to me during my stay.

⁵³ All of these productions, along with much of the group's additional work, have been released through Pueblo Nuevo.

⁵⁴ These are terms that Aguilar and Chuequelaf themselves used to describe their activities.

⁵⁵ In addition extending well beyond music in the Chilean arts, this predilection maintains ideological ties to recent Chilean social movements aimed at replacing for-profit economic models in the country's education system, energy utilities, and other perceivably public domains.



Fig. 3.10: Lluvia Acida’s Rafael Cheuquela and Hector Aguilar (Photo by Rafael Cheuquela, used with permission) and cover art for *La Idea*, *Kuluana*, and *Insula in Albis*.

In describing his motivation to co-found Chile’s first netlabel *Impar*, for instance, Santiago-based sound engineer and electronic music pioneer Daniel Nieto (a.k.a. *Danieto*), stated “It’s all for the love of art, there’s no interest in making money or creating a business, it’s all more spiritual” (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/29/13). Likewise, archeologist/musicologist José Perez de Arce, who released the fascinating sound collage album *Son-Ido* involving samples of indigenous music previously collected for a museum sound installation, revealed in the opportunity of releasing this work through *Pueblo Nuevo*. He noted, “I don’t live off music, neither do I find the monetary aspect of music important, so the [possibility of offering this work] directly, and openly to the

whole world was far more gratifying than selling the disc” (Personal interview, Santiago, 7/19/13). Finally, Santiago-based musician, speech therapist, and multiple-netlabel-participant Alvaro Castro (a.k.a. Élansson) emphasized a similar sensibility in stating:

I prefer to promote my music for free, because I'm against this kind of pedestal on which the rock star, or the pop star, or the commercial bands [stand]. It's very complicated because I would really like to live with music funds. But I think if I would try that way, it would be against my principles... I think the music doesn't deserve to be [held away] from any people because of their pockets. I think everyone should have access to every kind of music. (Personal interview, Santiago, 3/27/13)

The ideological nature of this commitment to serve one's community through the public sphere exchange of art becomes evident when considered in contrast with the centralized, personalized, and commercialized turn that public media communication experienced throughout the dictatorship and during neo-liberalizing tendencies of the democratic transition in Chile (see chapter II). In this model it is the profit motive that largely dictates the content and character of exchange. And thus, when Pueblo Nuevo's online profile suggests the label “proposes a distinct manner of relating to its ‘artists,’ who, in publishing their music with Pueblo Nuevo, become part of a ‘community of musicians’ and convert themselves into advocates for the collective project” (pueblonuevo.cl), the distinction is conceived in relation to this socialized status quo. The new objective becomes service to and participation in a community, rather than individual gain. Likewise, in highlighting the netlabel medium's capacity to circumnavigate the barriers and limitations of the international music industry, and, in turn, enable everyday musicians to communicate directly with a public audience wherever they may reside in the world (pueblonuevo.cl), Pueblo Nuevo's profile also speaks to a more democratically conceived social and cultural ideal.



Fig. 3.11: Chilean street art. Further exemplifying a civic oriented dedication in the arts, elaborate and ubiquitous street murals decorate exterior walls in Santiago, Valparaíso, and other urban areas throughout Chile.

In accordance with these values, many netlabel artists conceive of their work as a realization of the same non-commercial, participatory, decentralized, and grassroots media ventures that media theorists like Rosalind Bresnahan identify as a civic necessity for the democratic advancement of Chilean society (2003:43-44). Elaborating this view in a way that situates small media ventures (like netlabels) in their broader social and historical context – while also synthesizing the contributions of post-soviet media theorists Jakubowicz and France Vreg – Bresnahan states:

Just as “small media” constitute important sites of resistance to authoritarian regimes and serve as agents of civil society “in the making” and “on the march” (Jakubowicz 1995a:33-34), once democracy is achieved they contribute to the “distribution of communication power among social groups (political, economic, ethnic cultural, religious, and others)” and play a specialized role by expressing the “attitudes, needs, interests, and aspirations” of these social sectors at the local level (Vreg 1995:60:61). (Ibid.)

In the field of local music gestation in Chile, many netlabels embrace this specialized role wholeheartedly, as evidenced most tellingly by the countless works released through the medium that creatively address precisely these forms of socially (rather than personally) oriented themes and concerns.

Political Posturing

The values attributed to more democratically rendered, community-oriented, and rigidly independent cultural interactions comprise at some least part of the larger ideological perspective that runs through the netlabel phenomenon in all of its manifestations. Yet, where these ideals also challenge institutionalized social conventions, as they often do, they may become further politicized. The medium itself becomes a message.⁵⁶ In fact, following Walter Benjamin's view that the "politicization of the media [is] the same as the politicization of art" (1973:xvii), musical activity in this context may take on a radical aura through mere association, regardless of its internal character.⁵⁷ For some artists and netlabel collectives this aura alone is sufficient to reflect and express underlying ideological and political commitments (and I should add here that nearly all netlabel participants that I interviewed held political sympathies that generally resonated with those of the Chilean Left). Others, however, invest their participation in such ventures with more overtly partisan allusions.

Nowhere is the latter posture clearer in Chile than in the aesthetic framework and collective artistic practices associated with Pueblo Nuevo. Going beyond loose ideological associations, this label's directors and affiliates have collectively encoded the organization with a rather explicit political orientation that symbolically binds its community and its content to a series of ideals and memories generally associated with

⁵⁶ Following this line of reason, Gerardo Figueroa, an artist affiliated with several netlabels and a key contact for this study, suggests artistic involvement with a netlabel is an inherently political act of expression. He goes so far as to say releasing music through the netlabel medium in order to further personal or even commercial ends is actually a disingenuous strategy (Personal conversation, Santiago 12/6/12).

⁵⁷ Chilean musicologist Juan Pablo Gonzalez seconds this view in affirming, "the meaning of the texts, in the wide sense of the term, is found not only in the texts themselves, but in the forms of production, circulation, and consumption" (2013:123).

the Chilean Left. Indeed, in explaining how Pueblo Nuevo also began as an effort to “rescue” and revitalize electronic music in Chile, Mika Martini stated:

In the beginning we decided that we would have a label that would have an opinion . . . a viewpoint – that this label wasn’t only for releasing music. We wanted to have a certain relation with our environment. (Personal interview, Santiago, 10/22/12)

In clarifying the nature of this relation, Martini further acknowledged that the label’s name and logo (three red flags) were chosen as a “combative” aesthetic, particularly referencing the country’s socialist history in the 70s, and making more generalized associations to “revolutionary” perspectives (Ibid.).



Fig. 3.12: Pueblo Nuevo logo

In fact, among these combative gestures, the label’s moniker acts as a loaded political signifier. By selecting the term ‘Pueblo Nuevo,’ the organization’s founders consciously traditionalized their artistic community as a reconstitution of “el pueblo,” or “the common people,” a self-referential concept historically employed by Chile’s leftist faction to define the ideals and identities associated with their politically imagined community. Given *nueva canción*’s role in popularizing this notion, most notably in the anthems like “El pueblo unido, jamas sera vencido (the people united will never be

defeated),” the name similarly plays on the critical role music played in sustaining this political community over the years. Further still, it invokes the dual meanings of the Spanish term “pueblo,” alluding to its connotation as a “nation” or “small community” to further signify the netlabel as the “new” virtual “place” where the revitalization of this identity becomes manifest.

With these references, the Pueblo Nuevo collective highlights a correlation between its political sympathies and the methods used to disseminate its artistic expressions.⁵⁸ This correspondence between structural and expressive commitment draws parallels to a long history of politicized cultural production in the region. It also sidesteps a concern raised by Benjamin and other Marxist theorists that political commitment in art may in fact be counter revolutionary when expressed only at the level of content, and not at the level of gestation and distribution (1973:xvii).⁵⁹ And yet, even as the message of the medium reinforces the message of the content in this context, the opposite is also true.

In subsequent chapters I focus directly on musical content, analyzing in greater depth several productions and compositional techniques that demonstrate the insurgent ideologies expressed in Pueblo Nuevo’s extensive catalog. For the time being, however, it is important to note that many of this label’s releases maintain a clear position in relation to the contentious “memory struggles” (Stern 2010) that have animated Chilean culture for decades, and that continue to directly influence and define the nation’s

⁵⁸ Indeed, the depth of this organization’s commitment to socialist ideals extends to its decision to not only renounce commercialism in its musical diffusion, but even to its disinterest in accepting donations, which Martini likens to “begging” (*Panoramica Subterranea No. 2*, 2012).

⁵⁹ In contrast, many Chilean popular music acts past and present have challenged capitalism in the letter of their expressions while benefiting from the exposure and profit generated from the circulation of their cultural productions in the very same capitalist markets their music criticizes. Popular cultural scholars have argued for decades whether or not mass exposure to such anti-capitalist messages may, in fact, eclipse the structural hypocrisies associated with their modes of production and exchange (See in particular Garofalo 1992). However, most netlabel participants’ activities resonate more with the view espoused by Benjamin.

contemporary political debates (see Fig. 3.13). Moreover, even those contributions that do not evoke any explicit political commitments within their individual content seemingly imbibe the politicized aura of the environment that hosts them.⁶⁰



Fig. 3.13: Cover art from some of Pueblo Nuevo’s more political contributions. (Clockwise from upper right) José Miguel Candela’s *Ciclo Electroacústico Salvador Allende Gossens*, an electroacoustic cycle that incorporates samples of Salvador Allende’s most iconic speeches;⁶¹ Alejandro Albornoz’s (a.k.a.

⁶⁰ In fact, many artists who have released politically ambiguous works through Pueblo Nuevo, suggested that the label’s revolutionary stance inspired their will to participate.

⁶¹ Recalling this remarkable work, Candela stated, “Our recent history was the dictatorship and the consequence of that in Chile – very political. So I thought about Salvador Allende and I began to do this work ... I admire the ideological world of Salvador Allende. I think that there was a very interesting thing happening in Chile that was aborted, with the coup d’état. It was aborted and another history began and we are in this history now. So I think it’s my civic duty to put these ideas in any space that I can put it... The musical scenario, normally in this art music, is very light, very clean of all the extra musical fields. So I thought that it’s a very good dimension to put these ideas and generate these concerns on these matters. And all the things that happen in Chile politically after the dictatorship are a consequence of the

Mankacen) *En Memoria* – another electroacoustic homage to Allende’s memory released on the 30th anniversary of the coup; *Memorias de un Calabozo* (Memories of a Dungeon) – a work that featured samples collected from an abandoned dictatorship-era detention and torture facility, reworked by various artists as musical works (see also chapter VI).

Though Pueblo Nuevo may be the most strident among its local netlabel peers, it is not alone in supporting these types of political commitment. Jacobino Discos, for instance, takes its name from the Jacobins, a left-wing faction instrumental in orchestrating the French Revolution. Its manifesto states, “Our critique is converted into creativity, and into the struggle against cultural inertia” (jacobinodiscos.cl), and among its contributions the label has released discs that address Chile’s contentious indigenous struggles – an inherently politicized issue in the region (see also chapter VI).



Fig. 3.14: Cover art from Lluvia Acida’s *Arte y Shamanismo Paleindio* and the compilation *Aukin Mapuche* (see chapter VI), both released through Jacobino Discos in 2011.

Michita Rex, though less overtly partisan, has inscribed a rebel stance in its name and aesthetic as well. As Fakuta explained, “mi jita rica (my cute little girl),” represents a demeaning phrase shouted by Chilean males as a come on to passing females. Hence, by exchanging the last word in the phrase with the term ‘Rex’ – “a word of strength, as in tyrannosaurus,” the collective employed a connotative inversion that challenges Chilean

dictatorship. All the problems that we have now with the education and with the health are consequence of the tons of laws that were signed under dictatorship and that now bind us. So that was the motivation, it was very extra musical. (Personal interview, Santiago, 12/5/12).

machismo and chauvinism, and by extension oppression in general (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/10/13). Here, works by key artists like Dadalu and Fakuta invoke a more pop music aesthetic to engage serious issues regarding female empowerment and socio-political disenfranchisement.

Share-and-Share-Alike

Although openly partisan political ideologies define only a fraction of all netlabel activity in Chile, and seemingly even less abroad, another philosophical view plays a larger role in uniting the international movement as a whole. This collection of values and ideals – broadly assembled under the umbrella term “Free Culture” (www.freeculture.org)⁶² – feeds on the technological advances of the digital revolution. It sees in them the promise of a new paradigm for cultural production, and one in which the distinctions between the creators and consumers of mediated cultural content are significantly diminished. While seeking to loosen or dismantle the previously exclusive grip of commercialism on mediated creative exchange, this movement also challenges the notion that creative productions must exist solely as the intellectual property of their author(s) or rights holders, rather than as a potentially common resource for all.

The theoretical origins of this philosophy may also be traced in part to Walter Benjamin, who presaged the potential of Web 2.0-connected societies in suggesting that technological advances might someday hold the key to more “social control of the

⁶² The word “free” in Free Culture is commonly clarified, in the tech world at least, by noting that this refers to free as in “free speech” rather than “free beer” (Anderson 2009). However, to the extent that cost restricts the liberty of ideas and expressions to pass ‘freely’ through a society, for many, “free” as in without cost also maintains great significance to the movement.

media” (1973:xvii). Arguing that this in turn might grant the common citizen the “authority to write” culture in addition to passively consuming it, he explained:

The distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer... Literary license is now founded on polytechnic rather than specialised [sic] training and thus becomes common property. (Ibid:73)

Sharing these views, Stanford University law professor Lawrence Lessig stands as a leading proponent of the Free Culture movement in contemporary times, although his views encompass the modern technological potential allowing users to easily *rewrite*, and thus transform, mediated cultural transcripts as well. In *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (2004), Lessig argues large media companies have become entirely too influential in shaping the legal framework that administers transnational cultural exchange. According to him, these laws, which often adopt the rhetoric of artist and consumer protection, truly serve the core interests of neither. Instead, they benefit large capital interests, while stifling creative opportunity and the consumer-oriented capacities digital technology affords to the common citizen.

As Lessig explains it, in the past, the capital-intensive nature of the physical production, distribution, and retail marketing of cultural artifacts clearly justified a legal and commercial structure that assured legitimate recompense for financial investments in cultural production. However, this model, which he defines as a “Read Only” (RO) cultural dynamic, resulted in a one-way relationship between a limited class of professional content producers and a relatively passive class of media consumers.

Digital media, by contrast, transform the means through which cultural expressions can and do change hands and evolve. In so doing they establish the conditions for what Lessig characterizes as the “Read Write” (RW) culture of the future – a paradigm marked by the media consumer’s ability to easily shift into the role of content producer and transformer. As technological innovations democratize the creation and distribution of entirely original as well as creatively derivative cultural productions, Lessig and others see corresponding transformations in the social and legal conventions that govern their use as necessary to promote and sustain cultural evolution.

Taken as whole, the netlabel movement embraces this perspective wholly, signaling its endorsement in large part through its adoption of the Creative Commons licensing platform Lessig co-founded in 2001. Conceived as a practical solution to the disjuncture between modern creative possibilities and what Lessig considers out-of-date copyright law,⁶³ these licenses allow content producers to customize the rights they withhold or forgo in offering their digital works for public consumption and possible re-interpretation by other producers (see Fig. 3.15). Hence, rather than assuming that “all rights are reserved” for a given production unless permission is expressively requested and legally affirmed, the Creative Commons paradigm flips the script. It assumes that permission to freely adopt and adapt is already permitted for CC branded works, except in ways expressly denied by their originators. In this sense, the movement seeks to engender a more collaborative and reconstructive cultural environment through less restricted exchanges of information and expression. Its vision is “nothing less than realizing the full potential of the Internet – universal access to research and education,

⁶³ Chile, like many nations around the world, has conformed its copyright protocols to international standards, which are largely based on U.S law.

full participation in culture – to drive a new era of development, growth and productivity” (creativecommons.org/about).



Fig. 3.15: Creative Commons license options with visual icons. (Image credit: City University of New York <http://guides.cuny.edu/c.php?g=318026&p=2575196>)

Throughout the remainder of this dissertation I consider in depth the myriad ways affiliation with Creative Commons and Read/Write sensibilities influence musical expression and collaboration in the netlabel context. However, I wish to stress here that when netlabel participants stamp their work with the Creative Commons logo, this act serves as more than just a practical indicator of what rights the author reserves or relinquishes. These declarations also function as ideological affirmations of the Creative Commons alternative and the entire Free Culture ethos with which it has become associated. Indeed, as Pablo Flores of Jacobino Discos relates, when he and his peers first encountered Creative Commons, they adopted it more as a means “to give a statement on what [they] make,” rather than as a measure to legally govern the use of their works (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/13/13).

Of course, the same principles championed by Lessig and other advocates generate significant opposition among various social factions as well. Indeed, entrepreneur and author, Andrew Keen, for one, warns against the negative impacts of a “cult of the amateur,” wherein professionally skilled authors of information and expression are replaced by untrained masses, who may undermine the value of cultural production and promote civic disorder (2007). However, it is precisely this underlying clash of ideals that allows the public embrace of these principles to take on an ideologically charged character. Technological innovation has caused a social rift between the adherents of the previous cultural paradigm and those who see promise in its alternatives. Yet, while both paradigms may have their social advantages and faults, Benjamin reminds that when such ideological divisions exist in a society, “an author must decide in whose service he wishes to place his activity” (1973:83).⁶⁴

The adherents of the netlabel movement choose the new paradigm – a choice reflected not only through their affiliation with Creative Commons but more specifically through the predilection many participants display towards the “share and share alike” variety of it. This format, colloquially referred to as “copyleft,” requires future users and adaptors to adopt the same non-commercial, derivative enabling licenses for their works as those tied to the original. To the extent this encourages social collaboration while minimizing the influence of capital on cultural exchange, this stance resonates forcefully with the entire ideological spectrum discussed thus far.

⁶⁴ Benjamin notes the bourgeois writer does not even acknowledge he has a choice, although the progressive writer does (Ibid.).

* * *

In summary, Pueblo Nuevo's Mika Martini has suggested that a significant inspiration for this netlabel's existence has been to cultivate an "alternative national culture" in Chile, conceived in relation to the overwhelmingly commercial nature of much of this country's mainstream media culture. This alternative encompasses a will to cultivate more vanguard, forward seeking creative practices and aesthetics than those circulated through the mainstream channels of cultural diffusion in the region. For many, the distinction also relates to the netlabel medium's capacity to foster a more democratic means of media participation, to encourage more interactive artistic collaborations, and to provide a public platform for meaningful socio-political dialogue.

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the local netlabel movement's will to engender this alternative means for national cultural expression and engagement resonates forcefully with a larger social movement taking shape in the country. This movement suggests, "another Chile is possible," one where more democratic, egalitarian, inclusive, and anti-materialistic and proprietary values prevail. And yet, even as this generally left-leaning turn remains particularly evident in Chile and in other parts of contemporary Latin America, it is hardly confined to the region. For this reason, I have also suggested that the netlabel movement in Chile highlights an intersection between contemporary social movements and socio-political proclivities at play in the broader, international Free Culture movement.

Finally, this chapter has illustrated how the new media and content production technologies associated with the digital revolution have transformed every aspect of the Chilean music industry. It has demonstrated how these technological developments have

provided the means to more fully realize a constellation of alternative creative and cultural interests. In the chapters that follow, I turn attention to the ways musicians conceive and realize their creative work within the new art world contexts fostered by these developments.

Chapter IV

“Anyone Can Do This”: Electronic Music Gestation and the Art of Sampling in the Art World of the Netlabel

Just as sound producing and sound reproducing technology becomes more interactive, listeners are once again, if not invited, nonetheless encroaching upon creative territory. This prerogative has been largely forgotten in recent decades.

- Composer John Oswald (1985)

Using the tools of digital technology—even the simplest tools, bundled into the most innovative modern operating systems—anyone can begin to “write” using images, or music, or video. And using the facilities of a free digital network, anyone can share that writing with anyone else.”

- Lawrence Lessig (2009:69)

Like many of the electronic musicians I worked with over the course of my investigations in Chile, Mika Martini’s creative space occupies an entire room in his family’s apartment.¹ A comfortable two-story home located on the uppermost floors of one of the countless high-rise buildings that populate the bustling downtown Santiago business district of Providencia, his dwelling looks out over the central thoroughfare of *Avenida 11 de Septiembre* and beyond to the Cerro San Cristobal hilltop that rises near the city center.² Tastefully decorated with numerous works of art and artifacts from his

¹ ‘Mika Martini’ is actually the stage name of Hugo Espinosa Chellew. This name has become so much part of his artistic and personal identity that many friends use it more commonly than his given name. Since this is the name I normally use in our interactions as such, I refer to him as such throughout this dissertation.

² Connecting with Santiago’s central corridor, La Alameda, to the West and rising up towards the cordillera and the increasingly posh districts that lie to the East, La Avenida 11 de Septiembre honored the date of the country’s 1973 coup with its name for several decades. However, following the electoral defeat of Providencia’s longstanding conservative mayor, the district’s new mayor Josefa Errazuriz announced this street’s name would be substituted by something less controversial in the near future.

family's travels in Chile and elsewhere around the world, the central living space in this residence reflects the modern, creative, and cosmopolitan personalities of all its inhabitants (Martini, his wife, and daughter). Yet even a casual glimpse into Martini's studio space, tucked away in a back room on the first floor, hints at the presence of an extraordinary creative and technical mind.

Here, a massive and meticulously arranged arsenal of electronic devices of varying shapes and sizes fills shelves, desk space, and every other corner of the room. A dizzyingly complex array of multi-colored cords connects many of these knob and switch equipped gadgets into an impressive network of analog and digital sound generation. Still, if not for the few keyboard synthesizers and audio speakers linked into the tangled web of electronic paraphernalia, a common observer might not recognize this as a music studio at all. There are no acoustic instruments – save for the nylon stringed guitar colorfully painted by Martini's daughter and hung on the wall as artistic adornment. No amplifiers, microphone stands, or non-electronic percussion instruments occupy this space. Indeed, at first glimpse, this studio more closely resembles the inner workings of a retro sci-fi spacecraft than the common conception of a music production facility.

In the center of the room, ostensibly operating as the cerebrum for this peculiar laboratory of sound, a laptop computer rests on a desk. To the right lies the most unusual artifact, a briefcase sized, keyless Serge Modular analog synthesizer/sequencer, custom built to Martini's specifications.³ Additional curious devices include a small box that converts light signals into sound waves, a pair of digitally programmable electronic percussion pads attached to a stand, and an electro-harmonix 2880 super multi-track

³ In 2002, I helped Martini communicate with this instrument's Wisconsin based manufacturers to coordinate this instrument's construction.

looper, which allows its handler to capture and repeat multiple layers of recorded sound in real time. Various mixers, digital/analog interfaces, and effects modules further extend the sonic possibilities of this collection, serving Martini as much in his recorded musical endeavors as in his captivating live performances. Amidst this cornucopia of technological possibility, the limits of Martini's imagination seem to present the only considerable restraint on his creative potential as an electronic music artist – and given the breadth of this imagination there really are very few restraints at all.

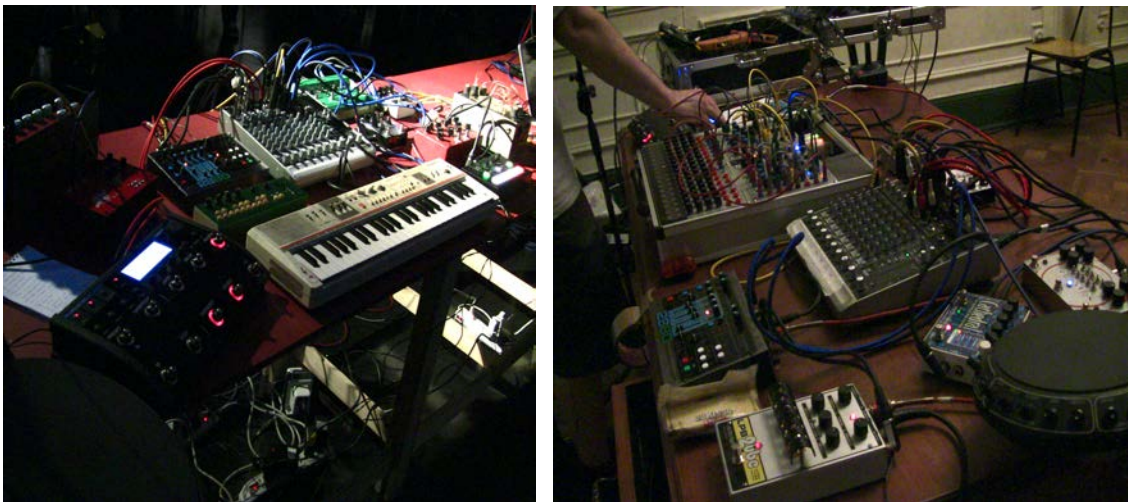


Fig. 4.1: Selections of Mika Martini's array of electronic equipment as arranged for various performances. In the picture to the right Martini's hand adjusts the controls of the Sergei Modular analog synthesizer. In the center of this photo lies his mixer, surrounded by various effect modules. The digital percussion pad stands in the lower right hand corner.

When I first encountered this studio in August 2011, I marveled that anyone could possess both the technical knowledge necessary to successfully integrate all this equipment and the creative inspiration to construct coherent audible art with it. Three years later on a late winter's evening in early August 2014,⁴ it all seems vaguely familiar, even welcoming. Though I concluded my primary fieldwork residence in Santiago in July

⁴ As a summer hemisphere country, winter in Chile typically begins in June and ends in early September.

2013, I have returned for a short follow up visit, hauling with me two more pieces of musical gear to add to the diverse assortment that already surrounds Martini and myself. These include a large (and heavy) 18 channel audio interface, which will allow Martini greater facility in simultaneously integrating his various external sound generators with his computer software programs, and also a small MIDI keyboard,⁵ to provide him with yet another means to manually maneuver the vast collection of sampled sound fragments recorded and stored within this same computer software.⁶ Eager to demonstrate the progress I have made in my own electronic music compositions since Martini and I last saw each other, on this occasion, I carry my own laptop as well.⁷

Following drinks and casual conversation, I cajole Martini into first sharing a few of his newest compositions. Humbly he complies, offering a handful of pieces that, true to his vanguard style, straddle the line between rhythm-driven electronica and more cerebral electroacoustic explorations. Next, my turn arrives. I cue up my version of the music production program Ableton Live 9, connect my computer's audio output into Martini's exceptional sound system, and wait in anticipation as my own sample-based compositions begin to resonate around the room. Martini listens respectfully while I play through several recent works, all in varying states of completion. After a long pause he offers a subtle nod and simply acknowledges that my skills are "avanzando (advancing)."

⁵ MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is a standardized digital technology that allows electronic instruments (keyboards, sequencers, computers) to control and communicate with one another.

⁶ Martini bought these instruments himself from a musical retailer in the United States; he requested that I deliver them to him in Chile to avoid the excessive shipping and duty costs. Suffice it to say my passage through customs with these musical contraptions required some creative story telling.

⁷ Admittedly, I am still a relative novice in this musical domain. My musical background lies elsewhere, in more commonly practiced popular, folk, and classical music traditions. However, with my ethnographic fieldwork I continue to study firsthand the fundamentals of electronic music performance and composition in the Chilean context to gain further insight into the technologies, techniques, and aesthetics associated with this musical culture. In this endeavor, Mika Martini represents not only a generous friend and interlocutor, but also a musical instructor and confidant.

Then, as I begin to trigger and toy with the various tracks comprised as part of a final work in progress, he picks up one of his synthesizer keyboards, presently linked to a series of sampled fragments populating an Ableton window on his own computer.

With a steady, syncopated beat serving to tie our experiment together, we start to collaboratively improvise. I click, tap, and drag across my laptop window, generating and manipulating multiple looping patterns of prerecorded samples in real time. Martini adds additional layers, melodically shifting the pitch of his own sonic fragments with the keys of his synthesizer, while altering various effects with a series of knobs and faders affixed to the same instrument. Eventually, in a moment of creative electronic synergy, I realize I can no longer decipher entirely who is generating which sounds. Amid this rousing juxtaposition of electronic rhythm, melody, texture, and noise, we revel in post-modernist cacophony for several minutes. And when the moment finally ceases, Martini and I adjourn to his balcony to continue our conversations on life and music like we have on many evenings before. As we take in the view, the equally frenetic sounds of the city streets emanate up to greet us from below.



Fig. 4.2: Mika Martini (wearing a Pueblo Nuevo t-shirt) in his home studio.

As one of the most well respected musicians in the field of contemporary Chilean electronic music, Mika Martini has acted as a primary intermediary throughout my ethnographic investigations. His knowledge, experience, and insight remain indispensable, and his work is referenced throughout the remainder of this dissertation. Nonetheless, I begin the present chapter with this brief introduction to his creative studio because it bears particular relevance in a few key respects.

First, the electronic equipment encapsulated in this space speaks in part to the relative accessibility and diversity of the technologies available to individual creators involved in contemporary electronic music and more broadly to independent music gestation in general. To be sure, the considerable expense and excess associated with Martini's elaborate assemblage of musical gear, and particularly the analog hardware pieces like the Serge Modular that have become increasingly integral to his work in recent years, hardly represent the common standard among the Chilean electronic music community as a whole.⁸ However, the more generalized notion of a personalized studio for music production, as well as Martini's creative reliance on a relatively new breed of powerful Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) computer software technologies for recording, sampling, and compositional purposes, certainly does.

This scenario marks a stark contrast to the 20th century paradigm wherein musical recording and post-production took place almost exclusively in elaborate, expensive, and often industry controlled music studios – or, in the case of early electroacoustic music, in university or radio controlled sound laboratories. Technological innovations like those encountered in Martini's home studio offer him and others like him unprecedented

⁸ From my understanding, the Serge Modular alone cost a few thousand dollars, a figure well beyond the means of many of the musicians I interviewed in Chile.

control over the means of creative audio production. This equipment, in turn, frees them from the necessity of compromising artistic visions with institutional interests.

Second, along with representing the personalized creative domain of a unique musical mind, this small, physically isolated studio space plays a central role in a considerable, cosmopolitan community of electronic and electroacoustic composers and performers. From this room, Martini acts as the director and primary creative visionary behind Pueblo Nuevo, the internationally recognized Chilean netlabel responsible for cultivating and disseminating the works of some of Latin America's most innovative electronic musicians. In this sense, Martini's computer screen serves not only as a window of creative possibility, but also as a communicative portal virtually connecting his persona and his musical work with the outside world. Further still, this computer acts as a technologically mediated social hub, facilitating a networked connection between countless other musical creators and aficionados that exists as much in the virtual space of the internet as in the offline lives of its participants.

Another glance around Martini's studio space reveals evidence of this function as well. A marker board on the wall opposite to the studio's desk highlights upcoming release dates tentatively set for the new works of various Pueblo Nuevo artists. Several visually intriguing handbills affixed to the walls document electronic music performances of the past, many organized by the Pueblo Nuevo community and/or inclusive of its varied acts.⁹ And most notably, a large banner near the entryway depicts the stark logo of the Pueblo Nuevo project, with its three red flags, demarcating the organization's leftist ideals, draped over a black background.

⁹ As a professional graphic artist, Martini creates much of the visual artwork associated with the Pueblo Nuevo collective. In addition to designing promotional handbills for the organization's various performances, he designs the netlabel's webpage and creates the 'cover' art for many of its productions.

The Art World of the Netlabel

In this chapter I draw from my interactions with Mika Martini and other prominent electronic musicians as I continue to examine the nature of artistic expression gravitating to and emerging from the netlabel scene in Chile. Here I recall Howard Becker's notion of the 'art world' as a network of social, institutional, and logistical factors that together influence artistic innovation and expressive conventions. Additionally, I consider Becker's assertion that significant shifts in the constitution of an art world may both result from and further influence alterations in the nature of artistic creation cultivated in its midst (1983). With this view in mind, I explore how the netlabel medium and its affiliated modes of music gestation and diffusion constitute a new art world formation capable of realizing pioneering musical works, produced by artists whose aesthetics, ideologies, and/or non-professional status place them at odds with the conventions of traditional mass media circulation.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the arrival of the netlabel platform parallels a much larger art world shift in 21st century media culture. Innovations in digital technology, social media communication, and the mass adoption of consumer generated 'read/write' production techniques and Free Culture sharing principles help define this shift. In fact, to the extent that these evolving socio-cultural dynamics go beyond "gradual shifts in interest, attention, and convention," while also "attack[ing], ideologically and organizationally, the standard" of the previously dominant order, one may go so far as to consider them an "art world revolution," according to Becker's terminology (1983:305).¹⁰

¹⁰ Becker further defines the criteria of a "revolution" in an art world system by noting that in this circumstance, "one or more important groups of participants find themselves displaced by the change"

Nevertheless, even in the context of this larger paradigm shift, several idiosyncratic developments further distinguish creative practice in the more narrowly defined art world of Chilean netlabels. For this reason, this chapter traces the evolution of the art world shifts influencing electronic music gestation in Chile over several decades. Beginning with an overview of the early history of Chilean electronic music, it contrasts the conventions and restrictions of this era with an examination of more recent transformations pertaining to the technological resources and social networks available to contemporary electronic musicians affiliated with the netlabel movement. Additionally, this chapter directs special consideration to the proliferation of musical sampling as a pervasive and particularly salient manifestation of these transformations, with significant aesthetic and ideological implications for nearly every variant of electronic music produced in relation to the netlabel medium, and beyond.

As a final note of introduction, this chapter and the next two are meant to complement and bolster one another and the reader should therefore consider them part of the same all-encompassing analysis. While the present chapter focuses on the overarching art world transformations influencing electronic music gestation in the Chilean netlabel context, the following chapter continues to investigate these same shifts through ethnographic and musicological analysis of specific compositional practices and representative works associated with three netlabel-affiliated Chilean artists. In turn, Chapter VI shifts attention from individual creative production to the patterns of collaboration, community formation, and socio-cultural dialogue that have also emerged in relation to this new art world context.

(Ibid.:307). Clearly, the evidence for this displacement in the wake of the digital revolution is ubiquitous. It may be seen in the art world of music distribution, and in the dissolution or significant decline of major labels, print publications, and brick and mortar music retailers, among many other examples.

A Brief History of Electroacoustic and Electronic Music Gestation in Chile

In November 2006, after only one year in existence, the Pueblo Nuevo netlabel released a large-scale compilation project celebrating and documenting *50 Años de la Música Electroacústica en Chile* (50 Years of Electroacoustic Music in Chile).¹¹ In bringing together 23 of the most influential Chilean contributions to the field, as realized by various composers over five decades, this endeavor demonstrated the archival potential of netlabel diffusion as a means to rescue and recirculate a significant but largely inaccessible history of musical artistry in Chile. It also served another function. Through mutual inclusion it traditionalized the creative efforts of more recent Chilean artists as part of a long and distinguished lineage of influential contributors to the field. Indeed, as curator Federico Schumacher explained, the edition acted as “a testimony to the bridges that have existed between new generations and those that initiated this adventure in Chile” (2007).¹²

This sense of legacy continues to loom large in the imaginations of many of the musicians considered in this study, as many draw conscious parallels between their work and that of these forebears. Still, the art world circumstances that shaped many of these antecedent traditions could hardly be more distinct from those shaping more recent manifestations. For this reason, I begin with a brief account of electronic music’s rather remarkable evolution in Chilean society, to help impart a deeper appreciation of the revolutionary developments impacting electronic music production in more recent years.

¹¹ Co-sponsored by the governmental FONMUS fund, the University de Acris, The Electroacoustic Community of Chile (CECh), and Pueblo Nuevo, this project included a three-CD production and a free streaming audio playlist made available through the Pueblo Nuevo website. This work remains one of the Pueblo Nuevo’s only productions not available to download. This is due in large part to the rights complications involved in reissuing such an expansive collection of historical works.

¹² <http://www.dicap-chile.blogspot.com/> *Cincuenta Años de la Música Electroacústica Chilena* (accessed 5/1/15)

Electronic and Electroacoustic Art Music

According to several accounts, Chilean composers count among the first pioneers of electronic and electroacoustic experimentation in Latin America (Del Farra 1993, González 2006, Schumacher 2005). While their contributions remained influential in the region and to the field at large throughout much of the latter half of the 20th century, it seems this trajectory began, at least in part, with an influential visit from French composer and electroacoustic innovator Pierre Boulez in 1954. Sharing both information and recordings pertinent to the genre, Boulez met with several local artists during his stay, including León Schilowsky, who composed Chile's first electroacoustic work *Nacimiento* in 1956, and José Vicente Asuar and Juan Amenabar, who would go on to become two of Chile's leading contributors to the field (Schumacher 2005:14). These encounters, coming at a time when Boulez's contemporaries in France and Germany were just beginning to establish their own experimentations with electronic sound generation and recording, clearly inspired members of the Chilean vanguard to embrace similar pursuits. As composer and scholar Federico Schumacher¹³ explains:

We can say that already in 1955 there existed in Chile the critical mass necessary for the spread of electroacoustic music: a group of young composers highly motivated by the discovery of new languages and sonic media, with a certain technical preparation. (Ibid.:18)

This initiative continued to spread at least through the following two decades. In 1957 Asuar and Amenabar helped to establish Latin America's first sound laboratory in Santiago's Universidad Católica (Ibid.). In 1968, Asuar initiated a degree program for sound technology studies at the Universidad de Chile in the interest of encouraging

¹³ Schumacher's book *La Música Electroacústica en Chile: 50 años* (2005) stands as the most comprehensive monograph on the history of Chilean electroacoustic to date. In addition to releasing works through Pueblo Nuevo, Schumacher also participated as a consultant for the present investigation.

collaborations between composers and technicians (Ibid.:48). Meanwhile, a core group of contemporaries, including prominent composers like Gustavo Bercera and Gabriel Brncic, helped to cultivate links between Chile, Europe, and other Latin American nations through teaching residencies, performances, and interpersonal relationships.

Like their European counterparts working in the genre during the same epoch,¹⁴ Chile's early electroacoustic pioneers explored *musique concrète* techniques of cutting and reassembling magnetic tape recordings. They recorded, classified, and manipulated the sonic qualities of everyday objects, while exploiting the compositional potential of purely electronic sounds produced by audio generators, synthesizers, and later, rudimentary computational devices. Following in the modernist vein, moreover, many of their works eschewed traditional Western art music conceptions of melody and harmony in favor of more aleatoric explorations of the unusual timbral and textual qualities of electronic and electroacoustic sounds.

As a point of departure, José Vicente Asuar's 1959 work *Variaciones Espectrales*, the first composition in Chile to solely incorporate electronic sounds, illustrates some of the techniques and aesthetics associated with this early era. For its realization Asuar enlisted the resources of the acoustics laboratory at the Universidad Católica. Incorporating the lab's two oscillators to generate a series of electronic wave formations with varying frequencies, he constructed his own modulating circuits to apply various filters to these signals. Distinct audio signals were then recorded separately and superimposed upon one another using a similarly self-constructed four-channel mixer (Asuar 1991, cited in Schumacher 2005:33).

¹⁴ In addition to Boulez, other key European contributors included Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer in France, and Karlheinz Stockhausen in Germany, all of who had at least some direct interpersonal contact with key Chilean composers during this time.

Musically, this 12-minute set of variations evolves as a markedly diverse series of sustained sine, square, and square tooth sound waves that often transform from one wave formation to the next. To the unguided ear, pulsating and glissandi pitch shifts skip and slide across the octaves, contrasting with more static tones, while repeated rhythmic motifs occasionally arise through the phasing beats of Asuar's electronic apparatuses. At times, it is not difficult to visualize Asuar toying with the various dials of his electronic machinery to affect frequency and envelope changes (much as Martini and others continue to do today).

According to the composer's own detailed conception, however, each of the work's four variations entails its own internal and autonomous logic.¹⁵ To paraphrase his explanation, the first uses continuous sonorities to construct dense "chordal" structures that result in "harmonies" (i.e. combinations) of varying electronic timbres. The second enlists more contrapuntal "lineal" techniques, which can be heard through the interactions of distinct pulsating audio signals that vary in pitch and serve as the closest approximation to traditional melodies in the work. The third, which Asuar describes as "evocative," abandons any allusion to conventional structures; in the interest of "transporting the listener to a new sonic world," it simply revels in the timbral diversity of electronic sound. The fourth then makes use of "rhythmic-melodic pedals," resulting in what the composer describes as a "danceable" piece, "a measure of the grand future that would present itself to electronic music through [relation] to dance" (Asuar 1959).

¹⁵ In commenting on Asuar's interest in framing unusual sounds in more traditional formal structures, Schumacher states: "Conscious of the impact that this first Chilean electronic work would provoke in the musical field, [Asuar] was hoping to make it as accessible as possible, because among his objectives was the exhibition, the illustration of the possibilities of the electronic" (2005:34).

Remarkably, although it debuted publicly in 1959 as the musical accompaniment to an experimental dance exhibition, *Variaciones Espectrales* remained unpublished as a recording and thus largely inaccessible to the general public for nearly a half century until its inclusion on the Pueblo Nuevo co-production *50 Años de Música Electroacústica en Chile* in 2006. This “unjust” and “inexcusable” omission (Schumacher 2005:31) from the mediated public sphere already exposes the difficulties faced by even the most accomplished vanguard composers and performers seeking to circulate their recorded works in mid-20th century Chile (see also Chapter II).¹⁶ Yet two additional factors further distinguish the creative environment surrounding early works like *Variaciones Espectrales* from those that would come later.

The first relates to the astounding level of technical expertise necessary to produce any form of electronic music in these early years. During their careers, Asuar and Amenabar in particular relied on a dual expertise in both music and engineering to craft their unusual works. Affiliation with the Universidad Católica’s engineering program granted both of these individuals familiarity with the types of technical instruments that could be steered towards musical ends (Ibid.:18). This training similarly enabled them to design and construct their own electronic equipment especially for this purpose, as Asuar did most notably in 1972 with the invention of his COMASUAR computer.¹⁷ The example of these artist/technicians thus signals a massive learning curve

¹⁶ In fairness, Asuar, Amenabar, and a few other electronic music composers were able to release a very limited number of LP recordings during their career (Schumacher 2005:31). However, these editions were sporadic and incomplete in documenting the remarkable works of these composers. The most notable among them, Asuar’s *El Computador Virtuoso*, also includes electronic renderings of canonical Western art music pieces rather than original works, in a style reminiscent of electronic music pioneer Wendy Carlos’s ground-breaking 1968 recording *Switched on Bach*.

¹⁷ Asuar created this computer for the purposes of generating and structuring synthesized sounds. It allowed the composer to program a pre-conceived sequence of musical events that the computer could then

associated with electronic and electroacoustic experimentation at this time. Forays into this field required a rare balance of abstract creative inclination and the advanced technical proficiency necessary to effectively bring this to fruition.



Fig. 4.3 – José Vicente Asuar, seated in front of his COMASUAR computer.

Yet technical know-how was not the only obstacle to entering this creative world. Early practitioners of electronic music also required access to an incredibly expensive and diverse array of equipment. At this time, these resources existed almost solely in the institutional contexts of radio, where Amenabar and other composers conducted their earliest experiments, or in university sound laboratories, where all of Chile's first generation electronic composers maintained ties throughout their careers. Schumacher confirms:

regenerate through a variable bank of electronic sounds. Remarkably, with this computer Asuar anticipated the similar invention of MIDI sequencing by nearly ten years (Schumacher 2005:30)!

The absence of [an institutional] laboratory in this epoch would mean, and it's not trivial to remember it, the impossibility of creating and researching in the genre, since only those with incomes considerably more than reasonable and with a solid technical formation, could aspire to have their own laboratory. (Ibid.:39)

Electroacoustic music in its first decades of evolution thus relied heavily on institutional support; and when that support withered, as it did under the more conservative cultural policies of the Pinochet dictatorship, the music lost its initiative and Chile lost its pioneering status in the field (Ibid: 37).¹⁸

Electronic Popular Music and Electronic Dance Music

As the academic current of electroacoustic music in Chile started to pass through its “dark era” in the 1980s (Schumacher 2005:37), a succession of more accessible and popularly oriented variants of electronic expression was just beginning to take hold in cosmopolitan musical culture. As a more rhythmic, cyclical, and youth centered cultural phenomenon, this too would soon come to play a definitive role in shaping local developments in Chile.

Tellingly, several interviews and informal conversations with my interlocutors revealed an extensive awareness of the entire evolution of electronic popular music (much as they did with that of electronic art music). Some artists pointed to the metronomic, synthesized music of the German *kraut rock* quartet Kraftwerk, which gained popularity in the 1970s, as a key point of origin for the genre. Some described the mechanized sounds of various industrial electronic groups as another important

¹⁸ For nearly the entire dictatorship period, two of Chile's most distinguished electroacoustic composers, Gustavo Bercera and Gabriel Brncic, lived in self-imposed exile in Europe and in other Latin American countries. Their separation from their homeland was the result of both political conviction and lack of professional opportunity, and their noticeable absence contributed to the significant decline in electroacoustic development during these years.

evolutionary step in the mid-1980s.¹⁹ Likewise, many spoke about the splintering of electronic popular music that occurred through the late 80s and early 90s, giving rise to electronica, trance, house, and countless other varieties of electronic dance music, popularized through an international rave culture that peaked in the mid-90s. Most universally, however, several contacts cited the arrival of a more intellectually oriented subgenre of beat driven electronica, sometimes labeled intelligent dance music (IDM), as a significant stylistic turn in the 90s.²⁰ Attributed most directly to UK acts like Aphex Twin and Autechre, this sub-current helped the genre expand its social relevance beyond the dance floor, allowing it to “become the inheritor of rock’s seriousness,” in the estimation of journalist Simon Reynolds (2009:553).

While foreign acts and genres from all of these eras serve as important stylistic points of reference and influence for many contemporary electronic musicians in Chile, this nation’s own contributions to these styles remained rather limited until recent years. This apparent disjuncture between longstanding local interest and the relative lack of output from the region can be attributed in part to a lack of access to the technological resources necessary to produce this music.²¹ A dearth of opportunity for local media diffusion and promotion in the 80s and 90s also contributed to the delay in local participation. Despite these adversities, however, a few notable electronic popular music acts did emerge from the Chilean underground in this era; and like the celebrated history

¹⁹ For instance, Punta Arenas based duo Lluvia Acida, introduced in the previous chapter, describe Belgian duo Front 242 as an important influence, both in regards to their heavy, mechanized aesthetic sensibilities and in regards to their political commitment.

²⁰ Notably, my correspondents mentioned Aphex Twin, more than any other single artist, as a highly significant influence. In fact, some individuals stated that hearing Aphex Twin in the mid-90s inspired them to take up electronic music over previous interests in rock, punk, rap, etc.

²¹ Chilean musicologist Juan Pablo González (2013) discusses at length the historical difficulties that Chilean musicians working in all genres have had in simply acquiring decent instruments and equipment – a problem that arises from both the lack of local industrial production and the high duties placed on imported consumer goods.

of Chilean electroacoustic art music these local accomplishments have become part of the overall cultural milieu of electronic music in Chile, serving as a source of national pride and as a musical influence for later generations.

Among these early progenitors of Chilean electronic popular music, the experimental trio Electrodomesticos deserves special consideration. Having carved out a place on the underground Santiago scene in the mid-80s, this act, which employed synthesizers, sequencers, and drum machines, in addition to electric guitars, bass, and occasionally horns, often receives credit as Chile's first electronic music group. The most peculiar and intriguing element of their hybrid style, particularly in the conservative context of the 1980s, related to their integration of cassette recordings from radio and TV transmissions and other forms of captured media. In lieu of a traditional vocalist, these audio fragments functioned as a central component of their live performances and recorded compositions, adding additional sonic textures to otherwise minimalist electro-rock vamps. Yet, on a more abstract level, these fragments also served to decontextualize and reimagine elements of the "urban sonic landscape" that often "passed unnoticed" in the course of everyday life (Carlos Cabezas in Escarte 1999:317).

Exemplifying this approach, Electrodomesticos's 1986 debut *¡Viva Chile!* stands as one of the most experimental and imaginative Chilean albums to be released by a major label (EMI) throughout the entire dictatorship period. It begins with its title track, featuring an extended recording of a TV interview with Chilean clairvoyant Yolanda Sultana. Introduced with a baroque trumpet fanfare included in TV Chile's Sunday morning broadcasts in the 1980s, the track commences with the voice of an interviewer prompting Yolanda to describe her visions for the future of Chile. As she proceeds in a

seemingly dispassionate monotone, a sparse electronic rhythm slowly swells in intensity around her, accentuated first with swirling synthesizers, and then with a jazzy chordal guitar riff. Midway through the track, sampled repetition begins to interrupt Yolanda’s monologue, leading the listener to refocus attention on both the content and the melodic patterns of her speech. The passing phrase “¿La futura de Chile, donde está? (The future of Chile, where is it?),” becomes a repeated mantra, heightened by a stuttering and cyclical one-bar phrase that seems to imply the nation has no clear future at all. The tension of this loop continues to build until Yolanda exclaims, “Viva Chile!” just as a climatic electric guitar solo breaks through the stagnating loop, initiating the final coda-like moments of the song wherein the guitarist continues to solo in celebratory fashion.



Fig. 4.4: Cover art for Electrodome's *¡Viva Chile!*

As illustrated in this and several other tracks on their debut, Electrodomesticos's willingness to play with the reinterpretation of popular media sources paralleled the "plunderphonic"²² interests of North American artists like John Oswald and the duo Negativland, who, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, also employed recordable cassette technologies to combine, re-configure, and re-contextualize previously recorded materials, often with novel and subversively ironic results. Mirroring the ideologies and aesthetics of this movement, Electrodomesticos guitarist Carlos Cabezas has described how the band sought to uncover the often-unrecognized "beauty that exists in certain movements of sound" (In Escarte 1999:317), as the rhythmic and tonal qualities of captured media sources became a point of artistic interest in and of themselves. Yet notably, Electrodomesticos engaged in social and artistic discourse with the contextual meanings of these source materials as well. Their works, though generally presented with a playful spirit, often suggested a more serious and dissident critique of the passive state of cultural consumption.²³

Another key track included on *¡Viva Chile!* further exhibits the creatively dissident side of Electrodomesticos's music. In "No estás viviendo bien (You aren't living right)," the group applies their plunderphonic approach to a speech by televangelist Jimmy Swaggart. Here the backing track consists of a shuffling drum machine rhythm and a simple, two-bar electronic bass sequence, occasionally interspersed with down-

²² As coined by Canadian sound artist John Oswald in a 1985 essay entitled, "Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative," the term 'plunderphonics' refers to both a musical technique as well as a creative ideology. In constructing creatively derivative artistic works, plunderphonic expressions sample, or "plunder," sounds from popular media, including those that may be protected by copyright. As such, they challenge the principles of copyright itself; arguing instead for 'fair use' policies that allow artists to creatively interact with their mediated environment, as long as the economic viability of the original work is not degraded in the process. This topic is further addressed later in this chapter.

²³ In this respect, much like the clandestine cassette culture taking place in Chile at the same time, Electrodomesticos represent an influential local forebear to the read/write and remix cultures that have since become increasingly salient in the digital age.

bended notes and washes of minor key harmony on synthesizer. Over this, Swaggart's impassioned voice, implores listeners to change their sinful ways, as an interpreter translates his message into Spanish. A dissonant electric guitar solo, drenched in a fuzz effect, echoes the tension and aggression of the sermon throughout. However, the true appeal of the piece arrives through its focus on the humorous juxtaposition of Swaggart's message with that of his extremely zealous interpreter. As the Spanish voice mimics and re-emphasizes that of the North American media icon throughout the 6 ½ minute track, attention is drawn not only to the syncopated rhythms of Swaggart's speech patterns in relation to the music (as in the repeated phrase, "He [Jesus]... will...fill... you...up... to... the... brim!"), but also to the unrestrained fervor of the interpreter's shouted translations, ("Te llenará hasta arriba!!!," in this case). As such, the piece evokes a subjective and contextual commentary pertaining to issues of imperialism and local complicity in Latin America. When interpreted in relation to Swaggart's own self-proclaimed moral failings, and in the context of the album's "Viva Chile!" theme, it also unravels a deep sense of hypocrisy associated with the socio-cultural critique "you are not living right," which has underscored centuries of North Atlantic interventions in Latin America.

Despite their relatively low-tech production techniques and enduring underground status, Electrodomesticos significantly influenced subsequent generations of electronic popular musicians in Chile. In fact, I introduce "No estás viviendo bien" here in part because this track has itself been 'plundered' as source material for a more recent work analyzed in the following chapter. Still, moving beyond this group, and the otherwise

rather unremarkable decade for Chilean electronic music from which they emerged,²⁴ the popularization of EDM and IDM that took hold in Chile in the 1990s also deserves a brief mention.

Due in part to the nation's role as a travel destination for international youth, Chile started to host its first raves along its coasts and among its natural landscapes in the early part of this decade. Eventually, in an attempt to cater to this genre's increasing popularity among cosmopolitan tourists, the country's urban *discotecas* began adopting these styles into their repertoire as well (Salas 2004:204). As Fabio Salas relates, however, it was not until "increased access to the technological arsenal, whose costs lowered through a rise in importation and which permitted local artists to be able to get the material necessary to play and record," that this genre truly transformed from a field of local consumption, to one with a strong and diversified level of local production (Ibid.:219). This transformation, in relation to both the nature and availability of music production and distribution technologies, taking place in tandem with the arrival of the new millennium, represents the beginning of the key art world shifts that initiated the contemporary electronic music practices considered below.

Electronic Music Gestation in the 21st-century

While abstract electroacoustic music and the more rhythmic variants of electronic popular music represent dual streams of influence on many of the contemporary musical practices outlined throughout this dissertation, their convergence in and arrival to the

²⁴ Chile's only other electronic popular music act to obtain a national following in the 1980s was Aparato Raro. Although this group clearly drew influence Kraftwerk, they leaned more in the direction of synth-pop and the new wave sounds of the 80s. In comparison to Electrodomesticos, they also adopted a far more traditional approach to pop song structures, using verse/chorus/bridge forms in many of their compositions.

netlabel scene in Chile has resulted from significant transformations in the art world networks associated with both of these traditions. As discussed thus far, electroacoustic music and electronic popular music remained largely distinct and disconnected throughout most of the 20th century, as much in Chile as elsewhere around the world. This separation resulted in large part from significant differences in the art world patterns associated with the gestation, circulation, and reception of these musical fields. Electroacoustic music retained its status as an art music genre,²⁵ often attached to the institutional contexts of academia, where it was created in laboratory contexts and (intermittently) performed in university affiliated performance halls. Electronic popular music, by contrast, evolved mostly in relation to the expectations and necessities of more dance-oriented performance venues and/or in relation to the commercial interests of mainstream media distribution.

Each of these art world contexts applied its own pressures on the music created in its domain of influence. For instance, a steady and forceful quarter time beat remained a fixed convention for electronic music artists working in the popular music sphere. Conversely, electroacoustic composer/performers, in the interest of maintaining a reputation for their music as a ‘serious’ art form worthy of continued institutional support, made conscious efforts to distinguish their music from popular music aesthetics, often opting for stylistic and formulaic markers that tied their music to the distinguished lineage of Western art music (as seen with José Vicente Asuar’s fondness for variations).

Nevertheless, as digital technologies continue to alter the ways in which each of these musical fields create and disseminate their works, many of the institutional,

²⁵ This was often begrudgingly so from the perspective of more traditional, instrumental art music composers.

contextual, and, by extension, aesthetic barriers that have until recent times kept them on separate tracks have begun to recede and/or transform. These changing patterns of activity have given rise to new networks of support and appreciation, as well as new creative opportunities, established through cross fertilization and unbounded experimentation. These same shifts have also brought electronic musical pursuits within the reach of a wider population of potential creators and appreciators, who continue to innovate with them in previously unimaginable ways.

As described in the previous chapter, this transition relates partially to the possibilities of non-commercial, internet-based music diffusion provided by the emergent netlabel phenomenon and other similarly democratic trends in 21st century media circulation. In contrast to the historical reticence of the commercial music industry to circulate or promote electronic or experimental music of any variety, and also in contrast to this industry's tendency to only do so with strict genre classifications and predetermined audiences in mind, netlabels have come to represent a common venue – an alternate means for previously marginalized artists of all stripes to access public diffusion and to do so with fewer creative restrictions.

Accordingly, one finds expressions of electroacoustic music and electronica, as well as other forms of experimental and/or non-commercially oriented music, existing side by side in the catalogs of certain netlabels. For example, Pueblo Nuevo's Mika Martini explains:

The only fixed rule was that [the netlabel] is open to raise whatever option, whatever contribution we thought was interesting. We aren't a genre netlabel. There are some that only release dub electronica, that only release EDM, that only release this or that, [and are] very strict with the selection . . . We would do something for a while and then do something different. We passed through hip-hop for example . . . Later, we got into the electroacoustic as well, and we began

to mix these scenarios, because it's an evolution. We are evolving according to what's happening . . . [We have] a netlabel that doesn't have any parameters relating to the industry market, with the music industry, with releasing successful discs, with creating a niche. It's a place where musicians come to demonstrate things . . . So we are using our freedoms. (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/27/2013)

It is important to mention that this intermingling of styles and genres does not relate solely to the juxtaposition of distinct artists whose aesthetic sensibilities resonate more with one genre or another. It also occurs within the creative works and practices of individual artists, as some exploit the reordering of art world conventions and expectations in the netlabel context to contrast or combine stylistic markers associated with previously disparate traditions. This shifting and increasingly uninhibited creative environment encourages entirely novel approaches to composition and performance that crossover and/or straddle the line between traditionally conceived distinctions of genre and stylistic convention.²⁶

New opportunities for Internet diffusion are not alone in defining this art world shift, however. Beginning in the 1990s, advances in digital technology and reduced costs for analog equipment revolutionized the capacity to produce and perform electronic music, and other genres as well. Perhaps most significantly, this technological shift relates to the introduction of a series of powerful computer software programs, commonly known as Digital Audio Workstations, or DAWs, which allow users to record, manipulate, and mix audio signals entirely within the digital domain (or “in the box,” according to insider jargon). Encompassing a wide range of commercial programs,

²⁶ This development parallels an observation made by my Chilean music industry scholar Valerio Fuenzalida that, “In effect . . . democratization in the area of the cultural industry, and specifically in the music industry, has been understood as a process that stimulates creativity, as much as it stimulates the diversity of musical creators . . .”(1985:2). This also echoes points raised in Chapter II concerning the changing aesthetics associated with previous art world alternatives in Chile, like those associated with the DICAP and Alerce record labels and also the clandestine cassette culture of the 70s and 80s.

including Pro Tools, Logic, Cubase, Reason, and Ableton Live, as well as free, open source programs like Audacity and Pure Data, this class of software has significantly widened the playing field for music production in the past two decades – not only in terms of what creative capacities individuals have at their disposal, but also in terms of who is capable of accessing these sound recording and production technologies. Indeed, as recorded music historian Greg Milner observes, “What the word processor did for the written word, Pro-Tools – and other DAWs such as Logic, Cubase, and Reason – does for sound” (2009:294).

Generally speaking, DAWs enlist a computer operating system window as the basic context for multi-track music production, their various functions may be easily manipulated with the same keyboard or mouse functions used in everyday computing exercises, and their audio and arrangement information may be stored directly on a computer hard drive. In addition to supporting live recording, through the use of microphone or direct line interfaces that capture audio signals and create digital reproductions, most DAWs enable users to generate and customize their own synthesized sounds entirely within the software’s domain. They also provide the capacity to sequence musical events through time, often through MIDI grid interfaces that arrange pitch or percussion distinctions and durations vertically over a horizontal timeline (See Fig. 4.8 below).

Once captured, recorded and/or digitally generated sounds are organized in DAW windows as distinct, independently variable tracks, often represented visually as waveform formations and/or MIDI patterns. The alteration of both independent tracks and the collective mix is then made possible through the application of innumerable

effect plugins (delays, glitches, distortion, etc.), dynamic parameters (volume, tempo, panning, etc.), and cut-and-paste editing techniques. With these comprehensive, diverse, and powerful features, Digital Audio Workstation technologies allow creative artists to orchestrate incredibly complex sonic arrangements with little more than a computer, a soundcard interface, and the software itself. As a result, they have rendered obsolete a whole host of exorbitantly expensive, technically convoluted, and often institutionally situated hardware devices previously necessary to fulfill many of the same tasks.

This transformation, of course, carries with it a host of art world implications. In the electronic art music context, for example, Federico Schumacher relates, “the time of the electroacoustic laboratory with its influence on the creation and diffusion of works has already come to an end, [it’s] practically out of fashion – the greater part of the new generations realize their musical activities not necessarily under the wing of an institution” (2005:83). Rather, many of these composers work in their own studios, with their own equipment, and without many of the direct institutional pressures faced by their predecessors in the field. Meanwhile, the same holds true for electronic popular music, where similar computer-driven technologies have largely replaced, or at least rendered non-essential, once expansive arsenals of drum machines, effects racks, sequencers, turntables, and samplers – tools that previously limited this field primarily to more professionally oriented (or at least financially secure) practitioners.²⁷

Like the distributive circuits used to share their works, the technological resources used by electroacoustic and electronic popular musicians have thus become increasingly similar; and as a result, the social and aesthetic barriers between these creative fields have

²⁷ For example, many of these devices required painstaking and time-consuming coordination that often demanded professional dedication to achieve satisfactory results.

become increasingly porous. This has enabled and encouraged new networks of artistic interaction and exchange and new creative possibilities, as exhibited in many of the creative and collaborative endeavors analyzed below.²⁸ What is more, while technological innovations have removed some of the social and creative barriers separating electroacoustic, electronica, and other forms of musical expression from one another, they have also dismantled many of the barriers of access and understanding that previously barred more aficionado practitioners from entering these fields at all.

Commenting on these new technological developments and their relationship to electronic music production in Chile, musicologist Juan Pablo Gonzalez thus acknowledges how this scenario, “has increased musical dilettantism, manifesting the existence of a more active public, that practices the music that it hears” (2005:189). Similarly, Evan Brooks, co-founder of Digidesign, the company that created Pro Tools in 1991, speaks of the democratizing trends enabled by DAW technology and their impact on music production in general:

The big thing that Pro Tools did, which we recognized right away, is that at the time there was a big divide in the music business. You couldn't play this game as a professional unless you were able to produce material that was of high enough quality, sonically, to be able to be played on the air. At the time, the only way to do that was in a professional recording studio. What we did was remove the barrier. (Cited in Milner 2009:298)

Admittedly, Brooks's egalitarian view of Pro Tools is somewhat misleading. The initially astronomical costs associated with this software and its dependent peripheral interfaces remained discouragingly high at least throughout the first decade and a half of its existence (In fact, during this time Pro Tools actually became the industry standard for

²⁸ This tendency is exemplified, for instance, in the Taller Electrico meetings discussed in the previous chapter, which brought electroacoustic and electronica artists together in the mid 2000s in the spirit of mutual aid and appreciation.

professional recording studio productions). In ensuing years, however, DAWs like Logic, Cubase, Reason, and Ableton Live have been specifically engineered to maximize their affordability and user-friendliness, in order to appeal to professional and aficionado consumers alike. Furthermore, Internet pirating, for better or for worse, has greatly expanded the accessibility and creative influence of this software to a new economic class of producers, while several freely accessible DAW programs have contributed to the same end.

Exemplifying this trend in aficionado music production, nearly all the Chilean electronic musicians considered in this study share the same technological essentials. At the most basic level, these include a laptop and/or desktop computer, various (often pirated) music production software programs, and an audio interface to integrate external audio inputs and increase the fidelity of the computer's audio output signal. Beyond this, some artists incorporate MIDI controlling keyboards, mixers, iPads, and/or other external devices to more intuitively and effortlessly control the near limitless possibilities offered by the DAW software. Some, like Mika Martini and Lluvia Acida (see chapter III), also augment their core DAW setup with a range of 'old school' analog devices, as these continue to provide their own sonic and formulaic idiosyncrasies, in addition to offering more visually compelling opportunities for live performance. However, even the costs of these peripheral devices have decreased in recent years, making them more readily available to dedicated, non-professional electronic music practitioners.

While the increased accessibility of this technology may not be considered entirely 'democratic' in the sense that a technological divide still limits such creation to a certain economic strata with access to, at the very least, a moderately powerful computer

and the know-how to use it, for the ever-increasing masses in Chile and elsewhere who do have these materials at their disposal the creative possibilities for individual electronic music gestation have far surpassed several limitations faced by previous generations. In fact, as aficionado musician and netlabel participant Gerardo Figueroa proclaims in a still unreleased documentary tracing his avant-garde musical life, now, “Esto lo puede hacer cualquiera . . . (Anyone can do this).”

Of course, Figueroa’s proclamation and the philosophy it endorses should not be taken to suggest that anyone can do this equally well, or that anyone can or should generate the same level of public interest in his or her work. Nor does this view discount the significant education and professional dedication that continues to distinguish some of the academically trained electroacoustic musicians releasing works through netlabels from their non-professional counterparts. However, it does celebrate the fact that 21st century social and technological innovations have enabled more and more everyday artists and aficionados to participate in a new phase of electronic music expression, which allows them to occasionally cross paths with these institutionally situated composers, and in some cases to garner significant public recognition for their contributions.

Nowhere is this new phase of electronic composition more apparent than in the proliferation of re-combinatory sampling practices, which characterize the creative work of nearly all the musicians considered in this study, regardless of traditionally conceived genre predilections.



Fig. 4.5: (Above) Pablo Flores at home displaying analog performance equipment associated with his “Estudios Itenterantes (Wandering Studio),” and the “Alpha Studios” of Hector Aguilar. The latter is located in his home in Punta Arenas, where he records and produces music for his solo project and his duo Lluvia Acida, with Rafael Cheuquelaf.

Sonidos Tomados: Sampling in Contemporary Electronic Music

The web allows more fluid access to the recent history of the arts and their traces... In this sense, it is this possibility, along with access to the personal computer, which explains the more robust emergence of works with captured sounds (*sonidos tomados*) in our country.

- Gerardo Figueroa (2012)²⁹

Everything that can be done has been done and we can only rearrange the pieces.

- Chris Cutler (2001:107)

In the first few months of my fieldwork residence in Chile, I participated in a music workshop entitled *Sonidos Tomados* (Captured Sounds), hosted weekly by Universidad Alberto Hurtado's music extension program and led by my friend and key research interlocutor Gerardo Figueroa (a fixture in Santiago's netlabel and electronic music scenes, who seemingly knows everyone and everything concerning Chilean music, past and present).³⁰ Every Thursday evening I rode my bike through Santiago's frenetic rush-hour streets to Alberto Hurtado's humble campus in the historic, hurried heart of the city. On these often harrowing two-wheeled commutes, I took in the blooming foliage, occasionally clear mountain views, and tepid air of a luminous Chilean spring. At the same time, my ears were attuned to the chaotic sonic landscape of the churning city – bus horns, citizen shouts, metro trains rumbling underground, thumping *reggaetón* and *cumbia* rhythms bellowing from car radios, conversations in a still less than fully understood dialect. In another context, all these sounds may have echoed unconsciously

²⁹ This quote comes from a popular press article, entitled "El Missing Plunderphonics Para Todo: El Caso Chileno," written by Chilean musician and netlabel participant Gerardo Figueroa and published in *El Ciudadano*. <http://www.elciudadano.cl/2012/09/12/57063/the-missing-plunderphonics-para-todos-el-caso-chileno-pt-ii/> (accessed on 10/15/2014).

³⁰ Throughout my time in Chile, Universidad Alberto Hurtado served as an informal research affiliation. Music program director and distinguished musicologist Juan Pablo Gonzalez acted as an important advisor, I attended several lectures, performances and events hosted by this institution, and in addition to *Sonidos Tomados*, I audited a Music and Media class taught there by Sergio Cancino, director of Chile's Radio Uno.

through an otherwise distracted mind. However, my experience with *Sonidos Tomados* and a growing appreciation for a whole new outlook on musical experience and expression had altered my perception. Armed with a small audio recorder, I found myself listening keenly to the mesmerizing din of my surroundings, searching for fragments of sounds that might lend themselves to ‘musical’ reinterpretation, and ‘capturing’ these moments whenever possible for subsequent creative play.

The workshop itself comprised a handful of creative artists – mostly friends or acquaintances of Figueroa, interested in expanding musical horizons, or at least, in sharing ideas and techniques with like-minded aficionados. In our eclectic sessions we reviewed historical approaches to captured or ‘sampled’ sounds in musical composition – works by John Cage and Steve Reich, the plunderphonics of John Oswald and Negativland, mash-ups, remixes, hip-hop techniques, and a variety of Chilean examples. We also conceptualized, composed, and critiqued works of our own.

For these unassuming compositions we employed various techniques: joyfully plundering popular media recordings, taking field excursions to the *Plaza de Armas* and other raucous locations to collect the ambient sounds of the city, and capturing our own voices reciting verse. In turn, we digitally sliced, stretched, condensed, looped, reversed, and otherwise recomposed all of this source material in accordance with our creative whims and technical abilities – mostly using the freely accessible audio editing program Audacity, which Figueroa enlists as his own primary compositional platform (see Fig. 4.6).³¹

³¹ Since everyone in the group was relatively new to captured sound composition, we followed Figueroa’s lead in using Audacity to alter and assemble works on our own computers. While I had previously considered Audacity to be a simple audio editing platform, Figueroa enlightened us all to its potential as a

After nearly three months engaging in these amateur creative enterprises, this workshop culminated in early December 2012 with an informal recital at Alberto Hurtado. In front of a no-doubt bewildered audience, mostly drawn to performances associated with the university's more traditional music extension programs (i.e. violin, piano, voice, etc.), each member of the *Sonidos Tomados* collective debuted an original composition. These brief works, compiled entirely from our field recordings in the *Plaza de Armas*, encompassed a spectrum, passing from the abstract electroacoustic to more contextually oriented sonic collages. My own contribution, a two and a half minute work entitled "Ricos y Pobres," straddled this line.

The source material for this work included the sounds of chirping birds, a street preacher sermon, a glass bottle rolling down the sidewalk, tea vendor exclamations, radio broadcasts, and a panpipe *conjunto* playing folkloric repertoire for a small audience of tourists and locals. In the context of an Audacity window, I imported all these sounds from my portable recorder into eight distinct stereo tracks that served as both my sonic palette and my creative canvas. Some of these clips, like the sounds of passing vehicles and fragments of conversation, I left more or less intact to ground the work in its worldly urban context. Others I altered extensively to lend the work a more surreal sensibility.

The first track of this piece featured the short phrase "ricos y pobres" extracted from the street preacher's sermon and duplicated as a perpetual ostinato loop. Accentuated by the naturally occurring descending pitch interval between these words (about a 5th), this seemed emblematic of the considerable rift between the 'rich' and the 'poor' in Chilean society; and consequently, it became the centerpiece and namesake of

minimalist creative tool. The simplicity of this software also allowed us to focus more on the philosophical and purely inventive dimensions of audio appropriation, rather than more tedious technical details.

the composition. Another track reworked an unrecognizable fragment of a classical symphony overheard from the radio of a street performer. For this I utilized Audacity's effects options, selecting various portions of melody, adding distortion, and applying the software's 'sliding time scale' to stretch four or five second audio clips to varying extended lengths. This resulted in a series of unusual electroacoustic sounds that I later mixed into the background of the track. Yet another track played with the pan-flute and *charango* textures of the *conjunto*. For these sounds I used pitch transposition, echo, and retrograde effects to capture the grain of these instruments, while masking any identifiable melodic patterns or phrases.

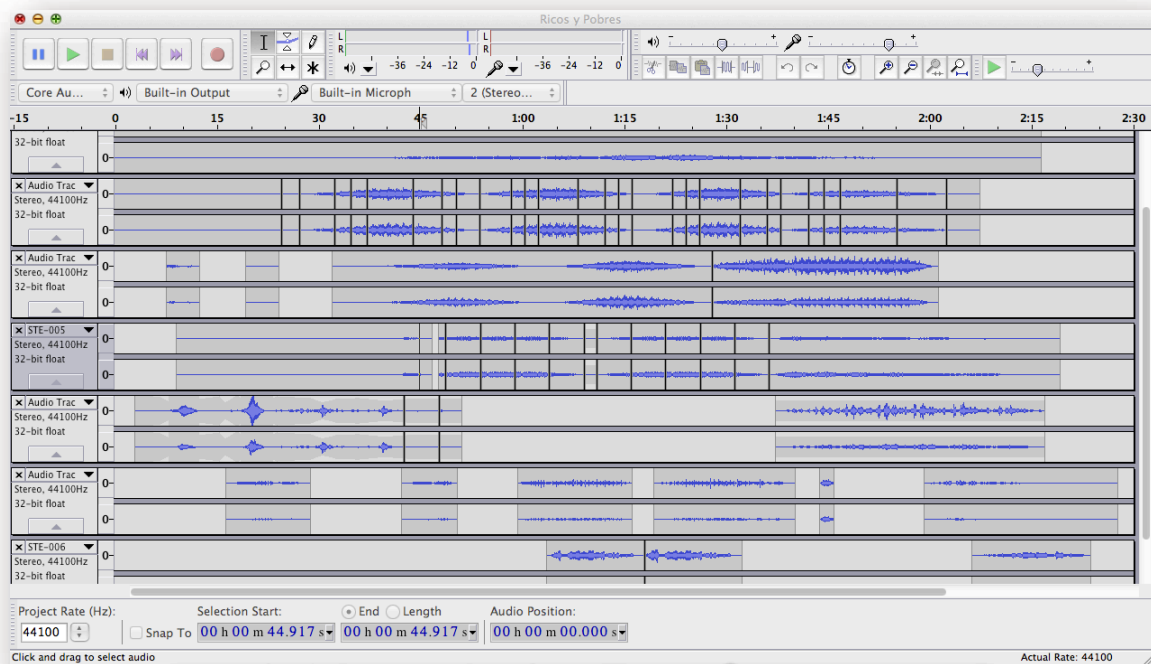


Fig. 4.6: Audacity window for the sound collage “Ricos y Pobres.” In this DAW program sounds are represented as wave formations, each line on the horizontal axis represents a separate stereo track, and the time cursor moves from left to right during playback.



Fig.. 4.7: Santiago's *Plaza de Armas*, with the Catholic cathedral on the Western edge of the square and the national history museum to the north.

In the end, all these digital shenanigans resulted in an amateurish mediation on the peculiar urban commotion emanating from the navel of the Chilean nation – a movement through time and space that attempted to capture echoes of the plaza's objective character, as well as some imaginative dimension of my interactions with it. Although hardly worthy of commentary based on its intrinsic artistic value, I share the creative processes involved in composing this work only to offer a subjective point of departure for understanding the re-combinatory practices central to the contemporary electronic music culture investigated here. My experience with *Sonidos Tomados* represented a rite of passage for me as a researcher entering this creative field. It helped to reacquaint me with the truly elastic nature of audio information in the digital domain. It raised my awareness of the relative ease with which any sound may be both captured and reinvented with even the most rudimentary and freely accessible DAW technologies. Moreover, several conversations confirmed that the processes of knowledge acquisition and initiation that I experienced through these and other encounters – learning from more technically adept friends and acquaintances, and advancing in skill through trial and error

experimentations – very much mirrored the experiences of many other electronic musicians and netlabel participants considered throughout this dissertation.

I also share this experience because the whole concept of *Sonidos Tomados*, as understood and conveyed by Figueroa through the realization of this workshop and through our subsequent conversations, exemplifies a larger philosophical, ideological, and aesthetic outlook tied to the art world transformations considered here, and shared by many in the Chilean netlabel community and beyond. This perspective recognizes that the artistic need to creatively engage shared and personalized spaces increasingly calls for the cultivation of techniques that both exploit and reflect upon new technological realities. In the auditory realm, as referenced above, these techniques and technologies provide amateur artists new tools for the creation of entirely original musical or sound art expressions. However, they also offer unprecedented opportunities to capture and recompose previously existing aural signs already rooted in personal and collective consciousness. As a result, they hold the promise of a new phase of cultural expression – one wherein everyday creators develop artistic meanings through direct interaction with and alteration of the acoustic universe that envelops them in all its constituent forms.

In referencing this field of creative practice, I adopt a broad definition of the term ‘musical sampling.’ For this, I accept musicologist Mark Katz’s view that while, “[s]ampling is typically regarded as a type of musical quotation, usually of one pop song by another,” it actually, “. . . encompasses the digital incorporation of any prerecorded sound into a new recorded work” (2010:147). While resonating with Gerardo Figueroa’s concept of *sonidos tomados*, this interpretation corresponds to the common understanding of the terms “sampleos” (samples) and “samplear” (sampling) that I encountered

throughout my investigations in Chile. According to this view, a ‘sample’ may be integrated with or without digital manipulation, even to the point of complete and unrecognizable transformation in the context of a new work. Further still, these ‘prerecorded sounds’ may encompass those initially recorded by others (for instance, as extracted from popular media sources), as well as those captured by artists themselves (as with field recordings realized on portable devices).³² In fact, for many musicians, the distinction between these types of source material is barely recognized – sound is simply sound, and *all* sounds potentially constitute raw material and fair game for creative play.

It is important first recognize that the underlying impulses associated with sampling are not unique to contemporary music making. Sound inundates daily experience, shaping how individuals and communities understand their surroundings, as well as themselves. Consequently, musicians and sound artists have always attempted to manipulate this phenomenon to the best of their abilities in order to mimic, mobilize, and/or reinvent their natural, social, and even supernatural environments.³³ Perhaps even more significantly, musical sampling also commonly reflects an intrinsic human inclination to recycle and re-appropriate the cultural signs of the past – a tendency that represents a near universal phenomenon, despite the rhetoric of individualism and innovation that tends to underscore cultural discourse in Western societies. It is for this

³² To clarify, the technologies of sound recording have become so commonplace that one may just as easily record sounds from an ambient environment as from media sources. In turn, this technological reality has seemingly diminished the perceived distinction – that is, except as this relates to the question of copyright law. This topic is considered more thoroughly in chapter VI.

³³ A particularly interesting musical practice from Chile’s northern Atacama region perfectly demonstrates this cultural inclination to symbolically engage the sounds of the natural landscape. As part of an annual ritual known as *cauzúl* or *limpia de canales*, which involves the clearing of the pre-colonial aqueducts that supply water to these desert communities, participants lead a procession to the Andean water source. There, the ritual leader listens to the natural overtones produced by the sound of the waterfalls, and these, in turn, “generate the song of the water-spirit and reappear in the human sounds of vocal and instrumental ritual melodies” (Grebe 2004:153) incorporated into a song-dance form known as the *talátur* (Ibid. 152-153, Gonzalez 1998:360).

reason, moreover, that Figueroa suggests his *sonidos tomados* approach to music making “is not a new practice,” but is more “like the resurfacing of an old practice or habit that grabbed a new media to be portrayed” (Personal Interview 7/17/2013 Santiago). Legal scholar Daphne Keller also defends the practice, observing that, “[h]uman culture is always derivative, and music perhaps especially so. New art builds on old art” (2008:135).

With these creative instincts already in mind, the more subversive and controversial aspects of musical sampling should also be measured in relation to the historical context in which this practice first appeared. Throughout the 20th century, as recording and broadcast technologies encapsulated more and more of our sensory and cultural experiences into a deluge of mediated expression, the possibilities for entering into creative dialog with the messages and meanings these impressions conveyed became increasingly limited for average individuals. Hegemonic patterns of media production and dissemination³⁴ disconnected large segments of the world’s population from responding in kind to the sights, sounds, and signs circulating through their respective public spheres – and this despite the fact that many of these expressions passed through perceptions uninvited, often without conscious recognition or approbation. This scenario rendered generations of audiences relatively passive in the face of a cultural soundscape over which they maintained little control.³⁵ While concerning in any society, moreover, this standard was all the more problematic in regions like Chile, where so much of the aural (and by extension symbolic) stimuli semi-consciously consumed in subways,

³⁴ These include, for instance, the technological and legal infrastructures designed primarily to sell sounds, or, even more pervasively, to sell other things with sounds.

³⁵ As explained in previous chapters, legal scholar and Creative Commons co-founder Lawrence Lessig describes this state of affairs as characteristic of the ‘read only’ paradigm of cultural production that dominated throughout the 20th century.

sidewalks, taxis, and bars arrived from foreign points of origin, along with the echoes of alien value systems.³⁶

In relation to these 20th century developments, the prevailing tactic for those inclined to resist passive cultural consumption involved the instrumental and/or vocal *imitation* or *reinterpretation* of symbolically significant sounds and musical styles.³⁷

However, another approach also appeared. Corresponding to the broad definition of sampling maintained here, this involved the actual *re-composition* and *re-contextualization* of previously existing recorded sounds, including those already circulated through the mediated public sphere as recognizable works or expressions.

This practice was (and is) obviously dependent on electronic technologies of sound recording and editing. In contrast to instrumental or vocal imitation or interpretation, it begins with what Mark Katz defines as, “*performative quotation*: quotation that recreates all the details of timbre and timing that evoke and identify a unique sound event” (Katz 2010:149). Vanessa Chang further distinguishes the activity, noting that, “Sample-based music uses sounds instrumentally, rather than using instruments to make sounds. In sampling, sound marks the beginning of the creative process, and is accordingly treated as raw material” (2009:146). From this shared point of origin, this phenomenon may also be separated into two generalized (and very much

³⁶ David Suisman recognizes the implications of this scenario in stating, “if sound contributes to the shaping of the self, then control of the acoustic environment – the ‘soundscape’ – becomes an issue with real social and political consequences” (2009:13).

³⁷ In fact, a great deal of the ethnomusicological and sociological literature produced from at least the 1980s onward concerned such attempts at fashioning counterhegemonic musical responses to similar conditions. This approach is exemplified, for instance, by reggae artists who transformed R&B styles by merging them with the homegrown rhythms of Jamaican folklore, or by Chile’s own *nueva canción* artists who found alternative nationalist icons in the instrumentation and stylistic markers of the country’s Andean community, among countless other 20th century musical movements. In the age of electronic media, however, the primary obstacle for these cultural responses concerned how to insert them back into the flow of cultural production and dissemination, particularly when their aesthetics and/or messages challenged the dominant aesthetics and/or values (see chapter II).

interrelated) categories of practice, characterized by the primary means through which they generate aesthetic, personal, and social meanings.

With the first, the sample maintains some recognizable, if not always identifiable, trace of its former self. In this way, as Chang asserts, the sample functions in the new work as a, “space of simultaneous play and rupture, where the past both defines the present and is effaced by it” (1999:145). Its meaning as a musical sign in the new work is derived through recombination and/or re-contextualization; and its aesthetic value may be assessed by the level of creativity involved both in its initial discovery and in its re-signification.³⁸

With the second, the sample simply represents sonic raw material, largely stripped of any explicit connections to the contextual origins of its source material.³⁹ Although somewhat overshadowed by its counterpart in the literature, Chang acknowledges this variant as well. She explains, “sampling cannot always be marked as a breed of creative indexing since the practice often pivots on the elision of the sample’s origin or, at the very least, the deflection of its aura” (2009:148). Intriguingly, this approach has become increasingly commonplace in the digital era, as techniques involving filtering, looping, pitch transposition, reversal, and the manipulation of time, among myriad other techniques, are commonly used to transform an initial sample to the point where, as has

³⁸ When involving the re-appropriation of fragments from previously recorded musical works, this practice has often been explained and defended as an extension of both the common practice of music quotation in European art music and the collective gestation and/or cultural recycling associated with oral or folk music traditions.

³⁹ To offer an example, in an interview, electroacoustic musician and multiple netlabel participant Renso Filinich responded my inquiries regarding whether or not he incorporates certain sounds for their initial meanings by stating the following: “no, for me its just sound, and its funny because this sound, when it is in your work, is not the sound that you [originally sampled]. That doesn’t exist now. It [becomes part of the new work], and when its part of that, its totally different. It has another meaning, another context” (Personal interview, Santiago, 5/6/13).

often been revealed in my own ethnographic inquiries, even the artists themselves lose track of the sample's point of origin.⁴⁰

Throughout the 20th century, precedents for these sampling practices surfaced in various art world scenarios as the result of diverse creative motivations and technological capabilities. In fact, it is curious to note that the predilection to employ preexisting sounds for compositional purposes, in some instances, actually preceded the widespread use of the technologies that enabled its realization. In the early 1900s, for instance, the Italian Futurists imagined a “new aesthetic of music” capable of harnessing as yet unrealized technologies and directly incorporating the sounds of their increasingly industrial surroundings. Led by Ferruccio Busoni, this movement inspired a new generation of composers “to open their minds to the use of any and all sounds in music” (Holmes 2008:12).⁴¹ The Futurists were followed by composers like Edgard Varèse, who pondered and later realized the artistic possibilities of recording technology in not only capturing musical performance, but also in allowing composers to draw from “all possible sounds” of modern existence and to compose *with* these sounds (Ibid.:17). In the 1940s, Varèse's contemporary Pierre Schaeffer began tracing a similar path, developing the techniques and aesthetics of *musique concrète*, which he envisioned in relation to his notion of the ‘sound object’ – a (commonly recorded) sound stripped of contextual

⁴⁰ This is not to suggest that these two approaches to sampling are mutually exclusive. In fact, often the opposite is true, as many artists employ them side-by-side, even within the same work. For similar reasons, it may also be preferable to consider these as two poles on a spectrum of practice, since even when context reigns artists rarely lose sight of the aesthetic value of a sample, and even when a focus on a particular sonic characteristic allows an artist to forget the specific origin from which it was drawn, often, at least in the artist's mind, some trace of its general ‘aura’ still remains.

⁴¹ This view was laid out most concisely in Busoni's 1907 publication *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, in which he also envisioned the role of technology in realizing his ideals, stating, for instance, “I think that in the new great music, machines will be necessary and will be assigned a share in it. Perhaps industry, too, will bring forth her share in the artistic ascent” (cited in Holmes 2008:13).

meaning and (ideally) appreciated solely on the basis of its intrinsic timbral and rhythmic qualities.⁴²

While these aesthetic and technical sensibilities became touchstones for many of the electroacoustic and avant-garde art music explorations that followed, beginning in the 1960s and 70s, the first significant traces of re-compositional and re-combinatory audio techniques began to arise from the popular music world as well. In contrast to the ideals of Schaeffer, however, many of the artists involved in these works delighted in playing with both the sonic and contextual elements of their source material. Although the psychedelic experiments of popular music groups like the Beatles and their peers represent early milestones on this path, in the late 70s artists like John Oswald took the approach a step further, developing new musical or sound art works *entirely* by extracting, altering, and juxtaposing semi-recognizable fragments of popular music or popular media recordings. This art form, which Oswald labeled ‘plunderphonics,’ took conscious aim at the previously one-directional flow of popular media consumption. In fact, he developed this technique, in part, as a means to assert his conviction that all music, “essentially, if not legally, exists in the public domain,” by virtue of the fact that encountering it in public life, “isn’t a matter of choice” (1985).

Of course, beginning in the 1970s, hip-hop artists further advanced sampling techniques by extracting small sections of popular music recordings, duplicating them as continuously repeating loops, and using these as the rhythmic and/or harmonic basis over which new compositions were composed. More recent innovations have also given rise to

⁴² Composer and musicologist Thom Holmes clarifies that, “Schaeffer’s original use of the term ‘*concrète*’ was not intended to denote a kind of sound source at all but only the concept of the sound object as the driving principle behind the creation of the music. A concrete sound could come from any source, natural or electronic” (2008:47).

the ‘remix’ – developed in large part by electronic music artists in the 1990s (see also chapter VI), and to the ‘mash up,’ among other techniques, which represent even more direct means of reimagining and recomposing the recorded works of others, and of thus entering into creative dialogue with these expressions.

To be sure then, ‘sampling’ in music composition and performance is by no means a novel phenomenon. The impulse to recompose, re-contextualize, and recycle recorded sounds, began at least as early as recording itself, developing, at times, as a conscious though often technologically and legally restricted means to regain some measure of control over a mediated soundscape that was becoming increasingly out-of-bounds for average individuals. What distinguishes the 21st century practices detailed in the following chapters from all these historical antecedents, however, is the extraordinary ease with which musicians and producers can now sample and recombine practically *any* sound imaginable (Théberge 1999).⁴³ As Greg Milner observes, “The rise of DAWs is of a piece with the rise of sampling and sequencing, as well as digital sound files and iPods, all of which contribute to music’s reduction into a universal code that can be recombined at will” (2009:301). With these technologies, techniques that once took accomplished experts hours or days to complete – by slicing tape, dubbing with multiple recording devices, or even by programming early analog or digital sampling devices (like those used in early hip-hop) – may now be realized in a matter of minutes or seconds by a relative novice. The production and editing capabilities of such programs allow for unparalleled precision, in addition to offering possibilities to continually revise and

⁴³ As stated above, modern technologies allow musicians to easily capture sounds from ambient environments (via a variety of handheld recording devices), as well as from personal media collections stored on computers. However, to the extent that artists may also use DAW technologies to record and manipulate sounds accessed via the World Wide Web, the creative possibilities are, indeed, nearly infinite.

experiment with the transformation of sampled sounds without ever relinquishing the option to return to a previous version.⁴⁴ Even more remarkably, the MIDI technologies integrated into most commercial DAW software programs, allow musicians and producers to go far beyond the simple arrangement and looping of unaltered musical samples. By assigning a sampled musical fragment to a MIDI grid, for instance, musicians may use an external keyboard or some other MIDI trigger device to effortlessly manipulate the pitch, dynamics, duration, and other parameters of a previously recorded sound in real time. Indeed, even without an external device, musicians may affect these same alterations by programming MIDI sequences for subsequent performance and/or compositional purposes (see Fig. 4.8).

In terms of the implications for art world dynamics, these emergent sampling-based musical cultures have contributed significantly to the alteration of previously held distinctions between the fields of electroacoustic music and the more popularly oriented strains of electronic music referenced above. For this reason, Chris Cutler observes that, “the radical inter-penetrations of low and high art in the leveling age of sound recording” have allowed these two fields of music to become increasingly indistinguishable (2000:103). He also agrees that, “[t]his aesthetic leveling is a property of the medium and this indistinguishability signals not a collapse but the coming into being of a new aesthetic form” (Ibid.).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Unlike in previous eras, therefore, such experimentations may be achieved with little or no risk of irreversibly damaging the overall creative project.

⁴⁵ In commenting on this same art world transformation, Waters further explains: “The shift from acousmatic electroacoustic music to what I have referred to as “sampling culture” can be read as a shift in the position of the central locus of electroacoustic activity – from a specialised [sic] economy in which production took place in the music academy, the university studio, the research establishment, to a mixed economy in which the above are a productive subset but which now includes the thousands of bedrooms and converted garages equipped with samples and DAT machines, as well as the clubland DJs and independent radio producers with their ‘scratch’ aesthetic and openness to the reuse of *any* material. ...

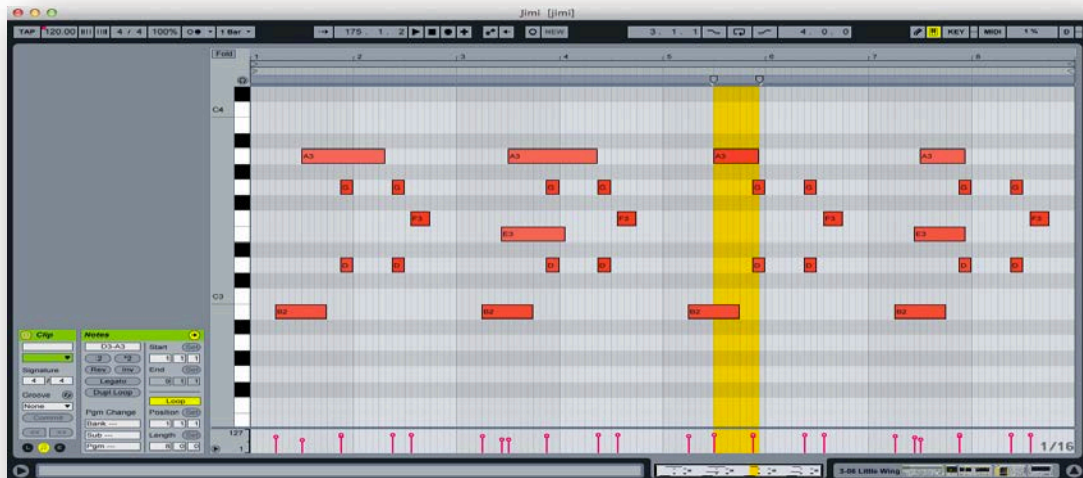


Fig. 4.8: MIDI window in the DAW software program Ableton Live 9. The smaller image shows a sample extraction/manipulation plugin, wherein the highlighted region of the wave formation to the left represents a selected (i.e. ‘sampled’) portion of a popular song. In this case, this same selection has been assigned to a MIDI track (as illustrated in the larger image). By sequencing values into the MIDI pitch/time (vertical/horizontal) grid, one may thus affect and organize a sample’s overall pitch, duration, and organization in time during playback. In turn, these sounds may be further programmed to mesh with several other tracks incorporated into a larger musical work.

Beyond this, contemporary sampling practices connect and contribute to the larger paradigm shift associated with cultural production in the digital age. In fact, Lawrence Lessig (2009) and David Beer (2005), among other scholars (Keller 2008, Garofalo 1999, Théberge 1999) recognize that, while serving to create more active consumers of cultural content, the digital revolution has also blurred the distinction between cultural production and consumption. *Producing* with the expressive and/or

[T]he specialised/non-specialised distinction has become effectively blurred, as has the distinction between ‘creative’ and ‘disseminative’ technologies” (2001:76).

intellectual contributions of others becomes an inherently more engaged and participatory means of *consuming* that content;⁴⁶ and the fact that the actual technologies used for media consumption and media production – laptop computers, iPhones, iPads, etc. – are becoming increasingly one and the same further contributes to this collapsing distinction, as individuals effortlessly shift from one role to the other and back.

Still, amidst these overarching transformations, two attributes remain particularly pertinent to electronic music gestation in the more specific art world context of netlabels. On the one hand, the conscious recognition of a shifting balance of cultural production away from the professionalization and centralization of media soundscapes and towards the domain of everyday artists and aficionados, who may capture and re-signify meaningful sounds at will, underscores the more ideological component of the *sonidos tomados* approach to musical creation. By engaging in these ‘read/write’ tactics, many artists recognize and even celebrate the fact that they are defying the cultural, political, and economic logic of a previous art world order. As a result, this stance contributes to the ideological dimension of the netlabel movement, wherein these techniques have become particularly prevalent (see also chapter III).

On the other hand, a profound and often consciously acknowledged correlation lies between the concept and practice of ‘capturing sounds,’ as considered in this chapter, and that of ‘sharing sounds,’ as highlighted throughout this dissertation, and as particularly exemplified in the economic model and ideological devotion of the netlabel movement. For many artists who incorporate sounds into their works that are extracted

⁴⁶ At the same time, sampling the ambient soundscapes of one’s non-mediated environments (traffic, nature, conversations, etc.) may provide opportunities to more actively engage with these contexts as well. In fact, as stated in the introduction to this section, my own experience in capturing these types of sounds for creative purposes helped to alter my perception and to thereby become a more active participant in these soundscapes.

from and thereby ‘shared’ with the audio environment in which they were first encountered, the sensibility naturally arises to ‘pay it forward’ – to not only freely share the products of these creative ventures with those who may appreciate them as they are, but also to freely offer these works as potential source material for others who may further alter and innovate upon their initial contributions. As such, these artists willingly insert their practice into a flow of cultural production that neither begins nor ends with their own work; and this, in turn, calls into question the very notions of proprietary cultural ownership and the sanctity of the musical commodity, as well as the values these concepts reinforce.

All of this, of course, opens the door to a host of legalistic questions primarily concerning the question of copyright, as these two paradigmatic views (selling vs. sharing sounds) compete for dominance in the contemporary public sphere. For this reason, many of these considerations will be taken up in Chapter VI, as I consider remix culture and its relation to the Creative Commons licensing alternative in greater detail. In the following chapter, however, I wish to continue exploring the possibilities of sampling, as well as a host of other techniques and objectives associated with the art world context of the Chilean netlabel scene, by shifting focus to the practices and works of a few emblematic artists working in this remarkable creative field.

Chapter V

An Analysis of the Works and Practices of Three Netlabel Participants

As suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, when the art world circumstances that encompass a field of music production and presentation change for any reason, generally speaking, so too do the creative practices cultivated within its sphere of influence. In the previous chapter I argued accordingly that while revolutionary transformations in music production and media dissemination technologies gave rise to the unparalleled art world of non-commercial netlabels in Chile, this in turn transformed many of the social and aesthetic characteristics of electronic music in the region. With the present chapter I continue to elucidate the creative implications of this art world shift through ethnographic and musicological analysis of specific practices and works associated with three netlabel-affiliated Chilean artists. These analytic profiles present firsthand accounts of the types of musical techniques, technologies, styles, and artistic objectives that helped define and drive demand for the netlabel medium in Chile and elsewhere. They also demonstrate how netlabel affiliation, along with the ever-advancing production technologies used in this artistic field, continues to shape the creative potential of these musicians, as well as countless others, in unprecedented ways.

As a methodological note, with nearly 200 individual artists contributing to Pueblo Nuevo alone, it would be impossible to offer any kind of comprehensive analysis

of all the idiosyncratic practices related to electronic music composition and production in the Chilean netlabel scene, let alone the wider transnational movement. Therefore, this chapter seeks only to reveal the general spirit and technological capacities affiliated with this field by considering the works, practices, and experiences of a few representative artists. While these profiles highlight some common aspects of electronic production in the netlabel context, as well as their relation to the larger art world transformations illustrated above, readers should recognize that the practices and contributions attributed even to those artists considered here without exception extend well beyond that which I am able to relate.¹ Additionally, while this chapter and the next direct attention to music production at the level of the individual netlabel artist and to the more collaborative dimensions of this field respectively, going forward it will become increasingly evident that these two aspects cannot be easily separated. Individual creations commonly evolve into collaborations within this nascent creative context, just as collaborative projects inspire and provide source material for more individualized musical expressions.

Gerardo Figueroa Rodríguez

I begin this chapter with a look at the creative practices and works of musician and sound artist Gerardo Figueroa for a variety of reasons. First, Figueroa, was one of my earliest contacts among the netlabel community in Chile; and since our initial meeting in August 2011, he has remained a close friend and an open and eager collaborator in my

¹ The musicians included in these vignettes, as well as those spotlighted in the following chapter's analyses, were chosen in part due to access and personal familiarity on my part as a researcher, and not necessarily because they stand apart from or above the broader pool of highly talented individuals participating in this community. The work of countless excluded artists might easily have been substituted for some included here. That is except for Mika Martini, who as co-founder and director of Pueblo Nuevo, Chile's most prominent electronic music label, has certainly earned an elevated status and influence among this community.

investigations. Second, Figueroa’s artistic works and practices epitomize many of the overarching themes addressed in the previous chapter and throughout this dissertation. They are, for example, boldly experimental. They deny genre classification, often occupying a space somewhere between traditional conceptions of avant-garde art music and more popularly oriented expressions. Also, they typically employ many of the democratizing and re-combinatory technologies of music production referenced above. Third, Figueroa’s artistic practices and perspectives reflect many of the ideological aspects of netlabel affiliation. His expressions commonly reveal a politicized edge, underscored by the plunderphonic exercises of media sampling and re-composition through which they are produced, as well as by the Creative Commons licensing practices through which they are freely shared. Finally, an English teacher by profession, Figueroa is content, even celebratory, regarding his amateur status as a composer and performer. In fact, he embraces amateurism as “a sort of artistic outlook” (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/5/13). Despite this non-professional and non-commercial orientation, however, attraction and devotion to musical artistry plays a defining role in his life, and this disposition mirrors the experience of many other netlabel artists.



Fig. 5.1: Gerardo Figueroa [Pueblo Nuevo Profile Picture]

Before delving into the peculiar details of Figueroa’s artistic practices and productions, a few anecdotes shed light on his long and evolving career as a performer, composer, and musical curator. For instance, reminiscing about his early attraction to music in one of our first formal interviews, Figueroa began by fondly recalling his fascination with the record player in his childhood home. He spoke of listening not only to the audio recorded to vinyl, but also to “what the record player did” – i.e., to the surface noise produced by the grooves and scratches, and “to all the process of watching the thing rolling and that” (personal interview, Santiago, 10/24/13). In later conversations he recounted an evolving interest in exploring the particular idiosyncrasies of cassette and then CD technologies as well. Hence, from an early age Figueroa began developing the somewhat unusual ability to listen beyond the signals translated *through* musical media, and to instead recognize and appreciate the unintended signs, or “noise” (Larkin 2008), transferred by a medium itself.

In ensuing decades this inclination has become even more acute. It plays a significant role in shaping Figueroa’s creative practice, as many of his works hinge on the altered perception of listening to recorded and/or ‘found’ sounds as part of a larger sensory and symbolic experience. Mirroring an approach pursued by the 20th century avant-garde, these works play on the cognitive interaction (or perhaps dissonance) between the objective, or ‘*concrète*,’ qualities of particular sounds and the more subjective expectations and frames of reference brought to the experience by the listener.

Figueroa relates, for instance, how many of his first sound art performances – shared at electroacoustic events like Santiago’s Ai-Maako festival, or at workshops like the *Taller Electrico* (see chapter III) – involved “lo-fi,” aleatoric “mash-ups,” produced

by juxtaposing sounds played on multiple CD players, complete with the “noise of changing the tracks and all that” (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/15/13).² Tellingly, he also recalls another particularly controversial early performance piece, a “ready made” as he describes it, comprising a CD version of the Beach Boys “Caroline, No,” with a pronounced and repetitive skip. As Figueroa recounts:

I was listening to the stereo version of "Caroline, No" and the CD started skipping, mostly in the ending, and it was so exciting to listen to that skipping and what it did to the material, that I worked around that, and the idea [of] sort of releasing [it] as a ‘ready made,’ a sound ready made. [But] no one at the time would allow me to do that, really. I remember it was 2008, and I was working with the guys at Pueblo Nuevo and they were still saying no to my ideas... (Ibid.)

Performances such as these are not without precedent or merit in the long history of the 20th century avant-garde. Daphne Keller, for one, draws on the artistic philosophies of Walter Benjamin in recognizing how, “It may be a culturally productive act simply to discover and draw attention to a fragment of text, image, or sound” (2008:143). With his own writings on sampling and plunderphonics, Chris Cutler goes further, categorizing performances such as Figueroa’s according to a technique he defines as, “total importation,” which involves a “reinterpretation or re-hearing of existing recordings,” with little or no manipulation (2000:107). Nevertheless, while Cutler acknowledges the historical precedent of this type of practice in the visual arts, he also notes its highly controversial and often legally untenable status in the field the music (Ibid.). According to Figueroa, moreover, this tendency was very much borne out through the reception of

² According to Figueroa, one such piece, performed at Ai-Maako in 2005 and entitled “Plunderphonia,” incorporated text from an interview in which John Cage discusses the influence of Marshall McLuhan’s work on his own. Read by one of Figueroa’s English students and recorded onto two CDs, to be juxtaposed live in performance, he notes that this audio “was so motivating because of the rhythmic aspects” of the student’s otherwise poor phonetic reading of the text (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/15/13). Yet, clearly, the nature of the text also contributed to the meta-narrative qualities associated with his overall creative approach in this case, as the text speaks precisely to the same type of creative practices employed by Figueroa.

his own performances, as many attendees displayed not only disapproval, but also anger and contempt (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/15/13).³

This experience points to another interesting turn in Figueroa's artistic development. Before the advent of the netlabel movement (and to a certain extent even after as the above quotation indicates), perhaps unsurprisingly, Figueroa encountered difficulties in finding systems of support and diffusion for the realization of his vanguard creative interests. He recalled listening to "many experimental things that were around" during his teenage years in the 1980s (Personal interview, Santiago, 10/24/12); however, when he initially considered compositional instruction in the university system to assist him in creating his own works in a similar fashion, he was roundly rejected.⁴ Around this time Figueroa also pondered his creative prospects within the popular music scene before realizing his artistic interests and qualifications would likely find an even icier reception in this industry. Thus, for nearly two decades Figueroa found himself operating in a creative limbo, inhabiting what he describes as a "twilight zone between art and pop music" (Personal Interview, Santiago, 7/17/2013), an artist who could not or would not fit into existing art world structures, and who therefore lacked the resources, social networks, and reputational capital necessary to advance his challenging and eccentric artistic ventures.

On a related front, since Figueroa had been excluded from the university music departments, where the only significant technological resources were housed in Chile at

³ Regarding Pueblo Nuevo's dismissal of such artistic proposal referenced in Figueroa's account, it may first be assumed, regardless of its avant-garde artistic merits, that the public dissemination of such an expression could present serious legal complications, even for a non-commercial netlabel like Pueblo Nuevo. In addition to this, however, even on the purely aesthetic level, this sort of artistic work extended beyond even the highly experimental parameters associated with Pueblo Nuevo, at least as they were conceived at this time.

⁴ As he remembers it, "They devised this sort of test, and me and most of the guys that were around didn't recognize any of the [classical] materials that they played...." (Personal interview, Santiago, 10/24/12).

this time (see chapter IV), his efforts were equally frustrated by a lack of access to adequate music production capabilities in these early years.⁵ As he explained:

I started recording things on cassette tapes in [the late 80s and early 90s] . . . and up to 1997, I just recorded my material on cassettes. . . I was sort of doing instrumentals, mostly influenced by this electronic music I listened to when I was a teenager, which was mostly music from the 70s. . . So I guess those things sounded like . . . some patterns that I had in my head from those previous recordings. (Personal interview 10/24/12)⁶

Despite this sense of determination to make do with the technologies at his disposal, Figueroa remained aware of his limitations – especially in relation to his inability to create multi-track recordings. He continued noting, “I started recording only the track I was able to. So, many of those recordings have only the keyboard part, or the guitar part, there's no melody” (Ibid.). Tellingly, however, his concluding remarks indicate that these circumstances also led to a significant creative disjuncture:

Mostly I feel the conflict that I had at that time was that I wasn't able to play what sounded in my head. So songs took years, and years, and years to be composed. And by 1997 I felt that nothing was going to happen, I was depressed at the time because of that. . . I remember doing some cassettes I gave to most of many friends. Many of them were very surprised and kind of puzzled because they couldn't grapple [with] the idea[s]; the approach resembled some art music material and that's what kept people very confused with that. And I noticed that that was what I was doing in a deeper sense. (Ibid.)⁷

⁵ Even as synthesizers, samplers, and home recording technologies became the products of an increasingly consumer oriented industry during the 1980s and 1990s (Théberge 1997), they remained expensive even in the North Atlantic and Asian markets where they originated. As such, they were all but inconceivably out of reach for average consumers in peripheral markets like Chile.

⁶ It is worth pointing out that Figueroa mentions beginning to record his musical creations to cassette at a time that corresponds to the final years of the clandestine cassette movement described in chapter II. If nothing else this fact further indicates the widespread use of cassettes as a homemade production technology, as well as well as a consumption technology in Chile at this time.

⁷ As an interesting side note, in addition to Figueroa's inability to fully document his creative visions through the cassette medium, it would seem that some of the confusion he describes concerning the reception of his cassettes at this time also arrived in part from a disjuncture between Figueroa's avant-garde techniques and the common expectations associated with the cassette medium itself. Particularly in the wake of the hand-to-hand cassette distribution and the wider commercial cassette industry of the 1980s, this medium was fairly concretely associated with the genres of folk and popular music in Chile as elsewhere, and much less so with experimental art music, which has always been more easily accepted as a performance genre. Hence, for someone receiving such experimental works with the aesthetic expectations of more formulaic, popular genres, it is not surprising that they might find this experience somewhat

Along with logistical constraints, the Chilean social context has also shaped Figueroa's creative dispositions in definitive ways. Growing up in the 1980s, through the final years of the Pinochet dictatorship – as well as through the student-led protest movement that brought about the 1988 plebiscite and the eventual return to democracy – experiences of repression molded his political consciousness, much as they have for countless others among his generation.⁸ These circumstances instilled a long-term distrust of mainstream media, as well as the understanding that music could represent a deeply transgressive act of political articulation and 'underground' communion in the midst of such a restricted public sphere.⁹ Moreover, even as overt censorship has abated, this view has changed little in the nearly 30 years since the dictatorship drew to a close. The perception persists, for Figueroa and many other like him, that mainstream media channels remain resistant to progressive challenges and closed to artistic proposals that truly disrupt the aesthetic conventions of the neoliberal marketplace.¹⁰

The dissenting stance that Figueroa and other netlabel participants take in relation to these media channels underscores the sense that non-commercial distribution through

confusing. In fact, in an interview with Universidad de Chile's Facultad de Arte (2012), Gerardo acknowledges that when these cassettes did reach individuals more versed in avant-garde musical principles, they tended to be more properly understood.

⁸ For instance, in the Facultad de Artes interview, Figueroa states, "... 17 years of dictatorship molded our daily experience – as much in my case as in many for many among my generation – and implanting, from the beginning, a concept of resistance" (2012).

⁹ Figueroa, commenting on the loosening grip of repression in the early 80s, thus recalls, "Most of the musical resistance to the dictatorship was not quite underground, but it wasn't covered by the press... deliberately." He also acknowledges that when certain musical expressions did slip into the mainstream – expressions that might subversively display "a sort of a connection with the previous period" – in these cases, "there was an excitement and a notion of transgression that was very powerful" (Personal interview, Santiago, 10/24/2012).

¹⁰ Echoing this view, Figueroa once mentioned, "We're not [absent from] the media because they don't know us, but because they do know us and don't want us to be there" (Personal Interview, Santiago, 5/1/2013). In light of Rosalind Bresnahan's research (2003) concerning the lack on democratic opportunities for media diffusion in the neoliberal, post-dictatorship Chilean state (See Chapter II), this perception may, in fact, have some grounds in reality.

the Internet, as well as Creative Commons licensing practices, are subversive acts in the context of an overarching and overbearing commercial media atmosphere. It also dovetails with the philosophies of plunderphonics (see chapter IV) – which Figueroa wholeheartedly endorses – helping to justify and delineate the capture, re-composition, and re-contextualization of media sources as a similarly transgressive act, directed towards transforming the products of capitalist commerce into expressions of populist culture.

Mirroring his wider political and artistic awakening in the 1980s, Figueroa also described discovering Chilean music as a source of creative inspiration at this time.¹¹ From this point on he suggests that mixing local materials, as a means of “trying to grasp a Chilean identity,” became an important objective for his artistic expression, and one that tied together the larger ideological convictions that motivate and define his creative work (Ibid.). These creative motivations, in turn, correspond quite succinctly with those held by Pueblo Nuevo – as exhibited by its dedication to release “Chilean music with electronic roots,” and with the generally leftist political sympathies reflected in the label’s symbolism and in many of its productions (see also Chapter III). Hence, it is not surprising that when Pueblo Nuevo first emerged in 2005, as part of the wider netlabel movement blossoming in Chile at this time, Figueroa naturally gravitated to this network as a heretofore-unprecedented source of artistic support and diffusion that appealed to his

¹¹ On this topic, Figueroa recalled hearing Violeta Parra on the radio for the first time in this era – as a result of the general thawing of the media censorship policies instituted in the 1970s (See Chapter II). He stated, “After listening to that program I felt like some sort of discovery...it was very powerful... Also, Los Jaivas... Congreso... Los Blops... I was really excited about what was going on. That was the time I approached Chilean music more consciously so to speak” (Personal interview, Santiago, 10/24/12).

proclivity for experimentalism as well as to his larger ideological and nationalistic convictions.

During this same period, Figueroa began transitioning his creative work to computer-based technologies for the first time as well. He acquainted himself first with the freely accessible audio production program WavePad; and despite the relative simplicity of this generally office-oriented software, this allowed him to experiment with techniques like looping, microsampling, and multi-tracking that were nearly impossible to maneuver using the re-purposed cassette and CD recording technologies he had been employing for over a decade.

Previously frustrated as a creative artist and separated from the resources necessary to realize his creative intentions, Figueroa thus encountered in the second phase of his artistic development a changing art world context, shaped by the shifting technologies and social realities of the 21st century digital revolution. This context provided, if not a direct path to the fulfillment of his creative intentions, at least a meaningful and attainable goal. And after following a somewhat meandering path to realization, Figueroa eventually fulfilled this goal with his first album length production, *Samsin Lai Dat*, released through Pueblo Nuevo (PN69) on September 11, 2011.

Samsin Lai Dat

As a researcher I had the unique opportunity to examine in depth the creative processes and intentions involved in this eclectic and generally well-received production. This opportunity arose through my interactions with Figueroa in the *Sonidos Tomados* workshop (see chapter IV), where I first encountered some of his creative methods and

philosophies. It also sprang forth from a series of interview/observation sessions, during which Figueroa allowed me to peer behind the curtain, so to speak, to see the origins of his sampled sounds, to observe the techniques used in their manipulation, and to listen as he explained the broader thought processes and motivations that inspired him to capture and transform these sounds in the ways he did. These intermittent sessions took place in Figueroa's one-bedroom apartment, which doubles as his creative studio. Relishing in the spirit of minimalism, moreover, Figueroa incorporated as creative tools only a MacBook computer, an audio interface, a portable audio recorder, and a series of free software programs like WavePad, Adobe Audition 1.0, and in more recent years, Audacity.

To begin, Figueroa's album *Samsin Lai Dat* evolves through 6 tracks and 3 bonus tracks in just less than 30 minutes - its title a playful transliteration of the English phrase, "something like that," as pronounced with a typical Chilean accent.¹² The album's core tracks establish a ludic aesthetic arc, despite being composed over a nearly 6-year period (2005-2011) without any preconceived intention of being released as a single work.¹³ A series of common techniques and themes subtly, though intelligibly, helps to tie the album together, as Figueroa employs plunderphonics, parody, and meta-narrative to creatively engage issues of imperialism, appropriation, free expression, and the complex cultural interplay between the local and the foreign in Chilean society.

Its initial track, "Re-(Gue-Te)-Nacimiento," begins with a brief glitch..... and then another..... and another. Separated at first by several seconds of silence, without

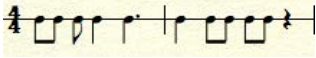
¹² This album (may be streamed or downloaded in its entirety from:

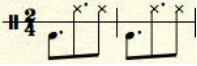
<https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/samsin-lai-dat/> or <https://archive.org/details/pn069>.

¹³ On the organization of this work, Figueroa related, "The curious thing is that this Pueblo Nuevo collection is a collection of material that I wasn't able to put to be downloaded anywhere... I was working on that [Pueblo Nuevo release] and things were finished and so I said 'Here, I have an album of things that can be ordered and listened to in a sort of progression.' In retrospect, even Figueroa himself acknowledged being somewhat surprised by the general coherence of the album as whole, as well as by its reception as such subsequent to its release (Personal interview, Santiago 5/1/2013).

a pulse or identifiable pattern, these glitches gradually become more densely arranged and rhythmically steady, echoing in stereo from the left to right channel until the listener may finally rest assured that they are not the result of a failing listening apparatus, but rather the coming into being of an actual musical work.¹⁴

Composed of snippets of crackles and pops extracted from recordings of Figueroa’s previous works using CDs, these initial glitches are joined in counterpoint around the (1:20) mark by another series of short and intermittently repeating fragments of sound (see Ex 5.2). First comes an “alternative wave” of CD clicks, comprising a quick “Ta, ta, ta” motif, created by applying an echo effect to a miniscule clipping sound (see Fig. 5.2). Next, (1:40), a succession of interrupted breaths sampled from the vocal aspirations of pop singer M.I.A. adds another layer of complexity, while helping to fix the track’s previously disparate parts into a more steady and recognizable rhythmic

pattern . Then follows, another wave of reverberating electronic distortion (2:40), constructed from a microsecond sample of digital noise, duplicated as a continuous loop that enters as a crescendo before drowning out the rest of the mix.

Acting as a transition, this ‘wave’ ends abruptly around the three-minute mark, giving way to a thick, reggae-influenced 2/4 drum pattern (). The result is a jarring, genre-bending metamorphosis from the piece’s electroacoustic origins to a more popularly oriented point of reference. From here the track rides the beat; the vocal aspiration samples return, complimenting and complicating the rhythm; then, a final layer

¹⁴ With “re-nacimiento” translating to “rebirth,” the track’s title underscores this sense of gestation. A nod to the birth of Chilean electronic music with León Schilowsky’s 1956 work *Nacimiento*, this title simultaneously frames Figueroa’s own work as part of a larger contemporary “re”-invigoration of this pioneering musical spirit. Yet, Figueroa’s willingness to play with the meanings of both English and Spanish connotations does not end here. The parenthetical “(gue-te)” helps to reference the Spanish term “requeté,” meaning “extremely,” while acknowledging the track’s ties to “reggae” influences as well.

of staccato brass enters the fold, completing the texture and helping carry the piece to its apex.

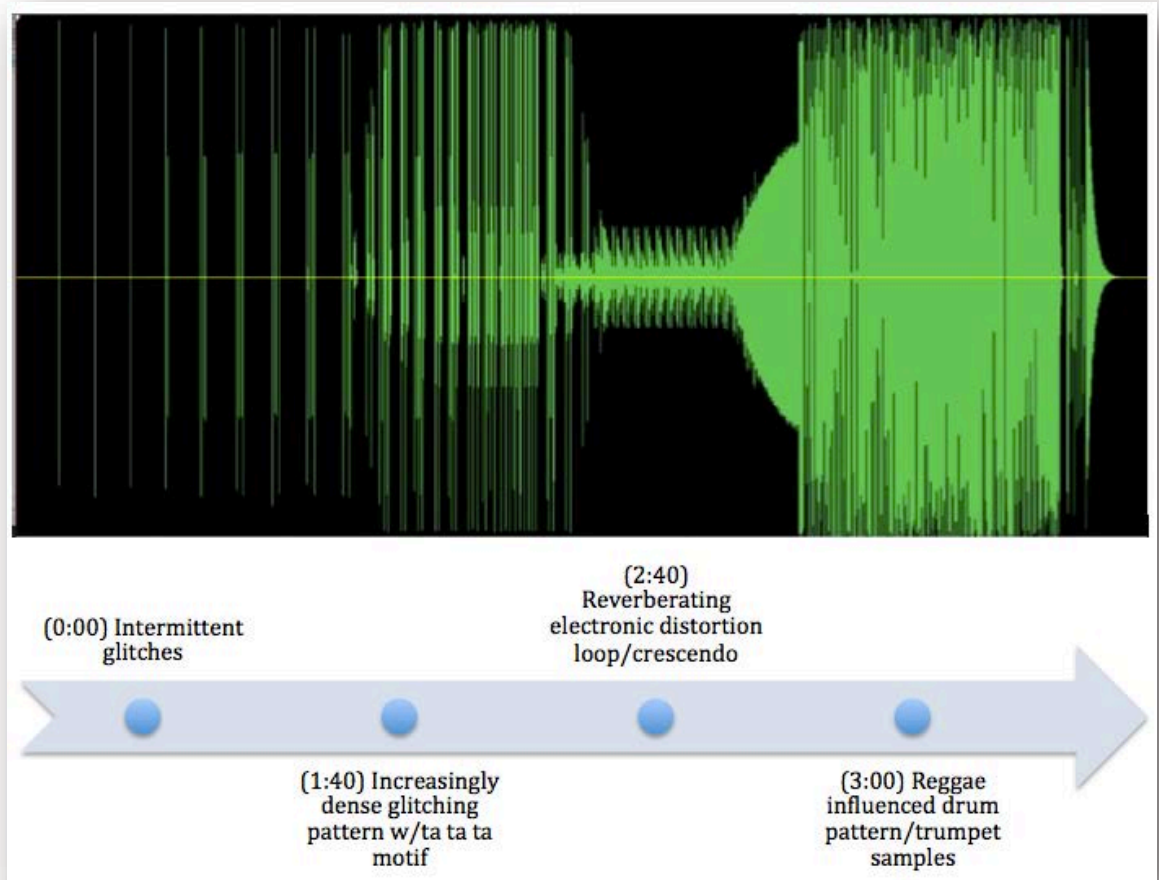


Fig. 5.2: Waveform representation of “Re-(Gue-Te)-Nacimiento.”

Of particular interest, these stabbing brass notes are the result of a rather simple but effective compositional technique. Having sampled a few measures of a tune by composer and progressive rock pioneer Mike Oldfield, Figueroa reverses this source material, and from the resulting retrograde pattern he extracts five tiny, completely unrecognizable clips (two distinctly pitched single eighth notes, a descending eighth note triplet figure, and two doubled eighth note pitches). He arranges these as interchangeable blocks of sound within a WavePad window, adding first one, then another, and another,

in alternating configurations as the measures roll past. This continues until all of these fragments lock into a thick, danceable groove. After a few moments an echoing cymbal crash then halts the pulse, and the piece culminates with an unexpected series of single word vocal samples extracted from distinct sources. Together these form the sentence, “hambre (hunger) y (and) sueños (dreams) es (is) lo (what/all) tenemos (we have)” – the final word a fading echo spoken by former Chilean president Salvador Allende.

At once an intriguing fusion of Figueroa’s dual interests in the electroacoustic and popular music worlds and a reflection of his commonly minimalist and plunderphonic approach to composition,¹⁵ this opening salvo presents a brilliant introduction to the overall unconventionality of *Samsin Lai Dat*. The thought processes behind this work also come into clearer focus when contextualized with insights into Figueroa’s broader creative philosophy. He relates:

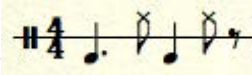
The idea of working with *sonidos tomados* [‘captured sounds,’ see chapter IV] by themselves, is becoming less strange here than five or ten years ago. Not just because of computers, but because people sort of have their ears accustomed to listen to these sort of fragments and pieces that sometimes denote some stuff and sometimes connote some stuff, and sometimes they become sort of source material [extracted] from the thing. So, on the one hand you feel that it is a whole new world to explore, and on the other, you feel that the more you explore it, the more you will be breaking some taboos that are still around, concerning how to approach musical composition and how to approach composition of sound... mingling these approaches from *musique concrète* to these hip hop samples and all those sort of divisions that have happened in the middle, or that are sort of moving in between or around it. [Its] definitely a true art form that has a lot to say and there's so much to do with that that we're not even able to foresee how far we can get. (Personal interview, Santiago 7/17/2013)

Though Figueroa’s willingness to break compositional taboos with this introductory track already hints at his ideological commitment to broach and endorse

¹⁵ In fact, Figueroa confirmed that, “this track was also a question [i.e. commentary] on the lack of dialog between Chilean electroacoustic musicians with pop or other local styles” (Email correspondence 1/1/2016).

more open and inclusive modes of cultural production and exchange, the second track on the album employs similar techniques to engage political commentary head on. Entitled “Sonidos Regalones 4.1 (Dem Bow pa’ mi Chile),”¹⁶ and described in the notes accompanying its release as a “panfleto sonoro (sonic pamphlet),” this piece juxtaposes two highly distinct source materials to compose a work that generates interest on multiple levels.

In one aspect, it incorporates an energetic rhythm track that Figueroa explained initially arose from an open call to remix the works of the obscure electronic musician Plasticflesh. The appropriation of this percussion-heavy source material draws out a small fraction of a more extended drum rhythm found in the original – a fragment that reminded Figueroa of the characteristic *reggaetón* ‘Dem bow’ rhythm, ubiquitous in

youth musical culture throughout urban Chile at the time ().¹⁷ This beat sounds throughout the three-minute work, interspersed with various fills and electronic embellishments, all of which were also sampled and recomposed from Plasticflesh’s original.

More significantly, Figueroa contrasts this rhythm with an extended discourse borrowed with minimal edits from an Argentine documentary focused on the arrest and imprisonment of Chilean journalist and activist Elena Varela in 2008. Following a brief two-measure intro from the electronic rhythm track – which presents a high-low alteration of harsh electronic quarter notes separated into the right and left stereo

¹⁶ The title of this track translates to “Generous Sounds 4.1 (Dem Bow for my Chile).” The ‘4.1’ references the fact that the piece is mixed for four surround channels and a central channel. “Dew Bow” is a popular rhythm featured in *reggaetón* music.

¹⁷ I can also attest that three years later in 2012-13, the rhythm was still practically inescapable in certain sectors of Santiago.

channels – this documentary audio enters suddenly, with the voice of an Argentine journalist questioning her compatriots, “What can you tell me about Elena Varela?” From here, the ‘Dem bow’ rhythm kicks in and various commentators begin to tell the tale.

They speak of Elena Varela as an artist, a musician, a composer... She had been teaching and conducting an intercultural orchestra among Chile’s beleaguered indigenous Mapuche community when she became involved in local activism... She was producing a documentary to publicize these political concerns... For this, she was arrested, charged with terrorism, imprisoned, and tortured by the Chilean authorities.¹⁸ A few more voices weigh in on the topic, before a young man summarizes the situation as such:

And so with Michelle Bachelet [Chile’s socialist president from 2005-2010], things haven't changed a lot, it’s the same as it was with Pinochet... The Mapuche people are fighting for their lands and they call them terrorists. So Elena showed that in the documentary and they didn't want that to be public...

In one of our late evening sessions, I questioned Figueroa about the conceptualization of this work, which intrigued me since I first heard it over a year before. As we sat drinking tea at the counter in his apartment, occasionally interrupted by aftershocks of one of Santiago’s routine 5-6 point earthquakes, he related how, when he composed it, he had already been seeking a means to comment on this issue for some time. Queuing up the original video, saved and meticulously organized on his hard drive along with countless other media source materials, he explained as we watched:

When I came across this recording [on the internet]..., [I] realized that these Argentineans at the Chilean embassy in Buenas Aires [protestors, who speak as part of the documentary] managed to tell the whole story in sort of 5 to ten minutes. So I said this is the track I'm going to use, this is the story I'm going to tell, and those are the rhythms I'm going to sample from the remix. (Personal interview, Santiago 5/1/2013)

¹⁸ Figueroa and various commenters speaking as part of the Argentine clip also claim that Varela was tortured during this period; however, I have no means to independently corroborate this accusation.

The documentary video is moving, and Figueroa is correct in acknowledging that it concisely surveys a complex issue striking to the heart of the deep-seated social tensions undergirding Chilean society. However, Figueroa's appropriation of this film's audio amounts to more than just a simple relay of information. As he re-contextualizes this material in an artistic context, presenting it as another expression of his predilection for near "total importation," it becomes clear that he encourages his listeners to engage this information on multiple semiotic levels.

Most obviously, the audio commentary directs attention to the plight of the Mapuche community, as Varela herself had attempted to do. On another level, it details Varela's own plight as well, connecting these two circumstances to a larger context of socio-political repression. Further still, the fact that this documentary footage originated in Argentina, adds another, more subtle level of complexity, as Figueroa himself acknowledged. Beyond highlighting an expression of Pan-Latin American political solidarity – as represented by Argentinian concerns for Chilean issues – it focuses attention on the difficulties that Chilean activists were having getting Varela's story covered in their own country. Consequently, the circumstances surrounding the origins of this discourse lend Figueroa's appropriation of it – from within Chile – an air of *clandestinidad* (to recall Laura Jordan's work on the cassette culture during the dictatorship, addressed in chapter II), as its diffusion through the netlabel medium comes to represent a subversive counterstrike to the very media censorship policies addressed in the initial commentary.

This then leaves a question concerning the intersection of this audio commentary with the 'Dem bow' rhythm and its electronic embellishments realized throughout the

work. This statement may be read in varying ways.¹⁹ What is certain, however, is that the rhythm serves to animate the dialogue, and this allows the explicit political commentaries contained within to masquerade as popular art, and to thus potentially cross into unexpected quarters of recognition and appreciation. What is more, while the rhythmic similarities between the *reggaetón* rhythm encapsulated in this piece and other reggae-derived patterns found throughout the rest of the album contribute to its aesthetic continuity, this continuity allows some of the political commitment overtly expressed here to bleed into the interpretation of the album as a whole.²⁰

As a final example from Figueroa's debut, the fourth track, entitled "Elizabeth Alexander Training in the Chilean Bush of Ghosts," embraces the issue of cultural appropriation and its contradictory reception through playful parody. Here again Figueroa's production techniques remain generally minimalist. Nevertheless, he manages to construct an intriguing meta-discourse built upon contextual references encoded in the source materials he samples.

Somewhat surprisingly, as our discussions turned to the techniques and context incorporated into this two-minute composition, Figueroa traced the origins of a personal creative commentary decades in the making. He began by relating his long time interest

¹⁹ On the one hand, for example, one might consider the ubiquitous dance-hall rhythm's juxtaposition with this serious commentary a cynical reflection of Chile's distraction in the face of the troubling tensions lying just below the surface – a proverbial dance upon the Titanic. On the other, it may be read in the reverse, as an expression of the growing mobilization among Chile's youth to address precisely these forms of social injustice.

²⁰ Importantly, the political encoding of this album as a whole is further achieved through its release date on 9-11-11, a date that corresponds with the anniversary of Chile's infamous 1973 coup, while also drawing an indirect reference to the complicated and intertwined history that connects the United States to Chile.

in the aforementioned Chilean 80s electronic group Electrodomesticos (see chapter IV).²¹ In particular, he recalled that in the wake of their 1985-debut *Viva Chile!* some local critics speculated that they had lifted their style – and especially their inclination to sample long discourses and juxtapose these with electronic vamps – from a similar approach propagated by pop rock pioneers Brian Eno and David Byrne in their 1981 collaboration *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. According to Figueroa, Electrodomesticos publically denied the influence. More importantly, however, Figueroa felt the accusation itself (along with the denial) signaled an inherent absurdity – that is, the notion that one group of musicians whose style heavily appropriated pre-existing aural signs might be charged with appropriating the style of another. In mounting a response to this mild controversy – which presents an ironic defense of cultural recycling in general, and a nod to read/write production techniques in particular – Figueroa thus begins by sampling a short drum loop from Electrodomesticos to consciously advance the chain of borrowing. By no accident, he specifically samples their song “No estás viviendo bien,” which, as referenced earlier (chapter IV), presents its own plunderphonic commentaries on issues of transnational imperialism and cultural appropriation.²²

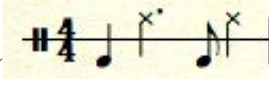
Figueroa’s contextual references do not stop here. He derives another component for this piece from the recitation of the poem, “Praise Song for the Day,” presented by Elizabeth Alexander at the 2009 inauguration of United States’ president, Barack Obama. Initially, Figueroa was goaded in this respect by American post-modern literary figure

²¹ Notably, Figueroa’s comments on this band, and his demonstrations of documentary and recorded materials pertaining to them, largely introduced me to their storied career as heroes of the Chilean musical underground.

²² As Figueroa explained, this piece evolved from an earlier idea to comment of this same issue by producing a mash-up of Electrodomesticos and Eno and Byrne pieces. This project was initially inspired by a 2006 public proposal to remix *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, but as this idea fizzled out, Figueroa began developing his piece in a different direction (Personal Interview, Santiago 5/1/2013).

Kenneth Goldsmith, a key proponent of cultural recycling and creative appropriation in his own right. After publicly declaring that Alexander’s poem “sucked,” Goldsmith used his WFMU radio and webcasting platform to provide an MP3 of the poem, and he openly called on others to remix and improve upon it. Heeding the call, Figueroa approached the four-minute recitation searching for fragments with which to make a statement of his own.²³ As this ‘remix’ proceeded, however, it took on a life of its own.

In his completed work, Figueroa commences with a short and chaotic Electrodomesticos break-beat intro, accompanied by a simple sample of Elizabeth Alexander speaking the work ‘begin.’ Following a brief moment of silence, a simple rock

beat sample (, altered from the Electrodomesticos original with compression and other effects, begins to carry the piece forward. Four measures in, Alexander’s voice sounds again, this time with the word “walking.” This initiates a four-measure exposition pattern that repeats through several cycles, with “walking” appearing just once on the first beat of each cycle. Half a minute later, a stutter step in the rhythm introduces a new word, “catching.” Approximately a fifth higher in pitch, this shift modulates the progression as the new word takes the place of its predecessor, although the repetition now shifts to two bars, rather than four. Another series of cycles and another stutter follow, before Figueroa introduces a final word, “speaking,” this one about a third lower than the initial. The momentum ascends, as this word now sounds on the first beat of each measure for another 6 bars.

²³ His mentioned that his attention was drawn at first to series of words with gerunds – walking, speaking, catching, etc. As he began extracting and compiling these in a dedicated file, and then re-assembling them in various arrangements with various software programs his ideas for a conceptual piece began to take shape.

With the exposition thus complete near the (1:00) mark, Figueroa uses the second half of the track to develop his initial ideas. He continues playing with the melodic intonations encapsulated in Alexander’s initial recitation, as well as with the rhythmic counterpoint that these words form with beat. First, he arranges “walking, catching, speaking” in immediate succession, all within a single measure, thereby highlighting the almost triadic qualities inherent to these words in Alexander’s natural speech. This proceeds through several repetitions before a highly processed sample of Alexander speaking the word “change” echoes in the background, signaling a reorganization of the phrase to “speaking, catching, walking.” Momentarily, an incantation of the word “sing” again shifts the word arrangement back to a now similarly processed adaptation of “walking, catching, speaking,” which resonates for a few bars of overdubbed cacophony until the piece resolves itself with a cymbal hush.

Break	(0:11)	(0:40)	(0:50)	(1:00)	(1:20)
Beat	"Begin"			"Sing"	"Change"
Intro					
		Catching...(4x)		Catching	Catching
	Walking...(4x)		Walking		Walking...(6x)
		Speaking...(6x)		Speaking... (6x)	Speaking

Fig. 5.3: Analysis of “Elizabeth in the Chilean Bush of Ghosts”

Despite (or perhaps because of) its relative simplicity, “Elizabeth Alexander Training in the Chilean Bush of Ghosts” easily conjures appreciation on a purely aesthetic plane. The interaction of its musical cogs generates a sense of rhythmic momentum and melodic development independent of any further associations. Yet, the work’s title offers a key to unlocking deeper symbolism as well. The “Chilean Bush of

Ghosts,” represents a humorous reference to Electrodomesticos’s *Viva Chile!*,²⁴ as characterized by the composition’s rhythmic base. In addition, Figueroa places Alexander in the satirical role of “training,” through his extraction of active gerund words from her initial poem. This serves to invert her own melancholic ruminations on alienation in modern everyday life by placing her persona in the context of an adventure in an “exotic” locale (i.e. Chile).

From here the associations are less readily apparent, but they are no less significant. In sampling “No estás viviendo bien,” Figueroa’s piece carries with it some “trace” of the antecedent work’s satirical, anti-imperialist “aura” (Chang 2009). Paired with fragments of a poem from a United States president’s inauguration, and a vague association to the work of Brian Eno and David Byrne (themselves notorious appropriators of foreign musical traditions), Figueroa also makes allusions to larger questions of appropriation and imperialism in the international cultural and political spheres. On another level, Figueroa’s minimalist remix of Alexander’s text, exalted on the global stage despite being considered by some as overly conservative and stagnant in its artistic sensibilities, may be read as an affirmation of more forward thinking approaches to cultural production.²⁵

In attempting to draw a few additional conclusions from Gerardo Figueroa’s work and from its connection to the netlabel context and the larger paradigm shift of which this is part, I will first reiterate that while Figueroa’s compositions are characterized by the

²⁴ As referenced above, this follows as *Viva Chile!* received criticism for being ‘the Chilean version’ of Eno and Byrne’s *My life in the Bush of Ghosts*.

²⁵ It must be conceded that for casual listeners not privy to the underlying thought processes and source materials, many of the references included in this and other pieces on *Samsin Lai Dat* may be cast upon deaf ears upon first impressions. Yet, this is often the case with artistic expression. The works provide a point of departure, as the deeper meanings encoded within are revealed through corollary conversations, interviews, and/or in academic works.

read/write principles marking this shift, these principles embody a key subject matter for his works. In fact, as a whole, *Samsin Lai Dat* serves as a conscious affront to many of the social taboos and public policies that tend to inhibit the very creative practices involved in its creation. As a positive endorsement of a more free and democratic alternative that includes sampling from and/or referencing artists like M.I.A., Electrodomesticos, Brian Eno and David Byrne, Mike Oldfield, and Kenneth Goldsmith, among others, Figueroa exhibits a tendency to remix and/or engage the work of others who have deployed similar acts of cultural re-appropriation in their own right. He finds his voice conversing through “rupture and play” with works built upon their own creative dialogues with the past (Chang 2009:145, see also chapter IV). In this way, even when sampling from popular media expressions whose publication preceded the advent of Creative Commons, Figueroa’s practices favor the promise of this 21st century ideal.²⁶

A second observation relates to Figueroa’s partnership with Pueblo Nuevo. Before the advent of the local netlabel scene, the rift between Figueroa’s natural artistic inclinations and the existing systems of production and diffusion was simply too great to even attempt compromise. With the introduction of this new medium, and particularly with Pueblo Nuevo’s manifestation of it, this distance became considerably less pronounced, although it did not disappear completely. In fact, as Figueroa mentioned above, for several years his works continued to be rejected even by the curators of Pueblo Nuevo for failing to meet their aesthetic criteria for inclusion.²⁷

²⁶ It is also for this reason that in one of our sessions when Figueroa mentioned the word “original,” and I asked in genuine confusion, “the original of what?,” we both broke out in laughter at the relativity of the term in the context of these practices.

²⁷ This was the case even despite the fact that Figueroa had been working closely with the label throughout this period as its resident English translator.

Viewed in light of Howard Becker's assertion that artists tend to construct their works with an eye to that which existing art world systems can handle (1983), the eventual release of *Samsin Lai Dat* in 2011 thus reflects a subtle push and pull between the individual and organizational interests common to any emergent art world context. Its fruition reveals the curatorial role of this new medium's operations in focusing or 'cultivating' the most boldly experimental (and some might say alienating) tendencies of vanguard performers like Figueroa,²⁸ in favor of new standards of expression that still challenge larger societal artistic expectations, while maintaining the label's appeal to its growing constituency. At the same time, however, its release highlights Pueblo Nuevo's willingness to stretch its own wings and publish increasingly experimental works from non-established artists, with the confidence that comes from a successful and critically acclaimed run of productions.

As a final point that speaks further to the transformative qualities of this new art world formation, Figueroa stated that following the release of *Samsin Lai Dat* "everything changed" concerning his reception as an artist. The prestige attendant to releasing an album through a respected label like Pueblo Nuevo seemingly altered audience interpretations of even his most experimental works. Hence, even as Figueroa's works continue to confuse or challenge common expectations for musical performance and representation in many contexts, his affiliation with Pueblo Nuevo has allowed him the benefit of the doubt, and in many cases, the merit of a more measured and attentive reception.

²⁸ As an example of this, Figueroa's 'liner' notes for *Samsin Lai Dat* reference another 'ready made' interpretation of a Pat Henry song that was left off the album, due to in part to fear of legal trouble, but also likely do to aesthetic concerns on the part of the label's curators.

José Manuel Cerda (a.k.a. *El Sueño de la Casa Propia*/ ESDLCP)

I don't know if [this explains it], but they are songs that when you hear them, you can understand them, approach them. At the same time, they are constructed experimentally... Basically collage, superimpositions, various processes that are more or less experimental. If I could sing, I would sing ... but I sing badly.

- José Manuel Cerda discussing his work (in Peirano 2010)²⁹



Fig. 5.4: José Manuel Cerda (a.k.a ESDLCP)

On a warm mid-February weekend in 2013, I had arrived just past midnight at the bustling two-story Santiago nightclub La Batuta,³⁰ where musician/producer/netlabel

²⁹ <http://www.cavila.cl/2010/07/02/jose-manuel-cerda-y-su-historial-de-caidas/> (Accessed 1/26/2016).

³⁰ In Chile, it is common for musical events to begin past midnight, and to proceed until four or five in the morning. A friend once explained that this schedule developed in part because Chileans tend to pre-party at home to avoid paying high costs for alcohol at clubs. Musical acts have been pushed later and later in to the evening due to the fact that no one shows up until after midnight anyway. This, in turn, has driven alcohol

artist José Miguel Cerda – a.k.a. El Sueño de la Casa Propia (The Dream of Home Ownership) – was scheduled to perform as the evening’s opening act. Passing through a drove of fashionably dressed students and young professionals waiting in line for drinks at the upstairs balcony bar, I made my way to the edge of the dance floor, where several others stood mingling. ESCDLP, a striking figure with a shaved head, thick stubble, and an intense stage persona, had already taken the stage to arrange and test his equipment;³¹ his drummer for the evening sat in wait nearby, occasionally checking his monitors and tapping out warm-up rhythms in the background.

After a short while and with little fanfare to separate the actual performance from the brief sound check that preceded it, a short musical phrase began emanating in repetition from La Batuta’s sound system. Merging with the commotion of the room, at first this did little to redirect the attention of the evening’s participants. Yet, with an exaggerated nod of the head, ESCDLP and his drummer generated a single explosive pulse, accentuated by a solitary electric guitar chord sample and a simultaneous bass drum/snare/cymbal strike on the drum kit that turned several heads to the stage. Following a pregnant 8 beat pause, as the introductory sample continued to loop ambiguously in the background, the stabbing accent recurred with altered guitar harmony. This intermittent pattern of shifting harmonic pulses rocked in pendular motion through a few revolutions of the metric cycle, until finally, with an exaggerated flick of a switch, ESDLCP triggered a thumping quarter time rhythm track, stressed and embellished by the live drum kit, that officially commenced the evening’s musical rites.

costs higher, as clubs attempt to recoup their profits in the minimal time that they have constituents on hand...And so the cycle continues.

³¹ This consisted of little more than his laptop (adorned with a piece of masking tape and the handwritten the letters of his alias), his audio interface, a small mixer, and an external MIDI controlling device (see Fig. 5.6 below).



Fig 5.5: El Sueño del la Casa Propia (ESDLCP) performing at Santiago's La Batuta nightclub.

Almost instantaneously, a wave of bodies hit the dance floor. Ribbons of multi-colored lights began flashing and swirling in time with the beat. Strange and semi-recognizable fragments of electronic sound melded and clashed in counterpoint with one another. As Cerda subsequently related, from here the performance evolved as a complex series of “layers, upon layers, upon layers,” of sample loops, juxtaposed and manipulated in real time, along with the various effects parameters Cerda used to bend and transform their shape and timbre in this way or that (Personal interview, Santiago 2/20/2013).

Never losing sight of its visceral appeal, ESDLCP's set remained ever beholden to the beat throughout its 40-minute evolution. Yet, as he built up, disassembled, and rearranged complex polyrhythmic and polytonal structures that, in turn, contributed to unexpected formulaic and motivic transformations, his largely improvisatory remixes of

his own eclectic recordings marked a clear departure from the standard conventions of electronic dance music. This was electronic popular music, but popular music marked by a sense of technical and structural experimentalism, born through articulation with the transforming field of contemporary electronic music referenced above.

* * *

As may already be clear from this brief anecdote, in comparison to the musical practices of Gerardo Figueroa, those of José Manuel Cerda rest at the opposite end of the spectrum in various respects. While the former situates himself as a minimalist, for instance, the latter has described his style as “maximalist.” He composes intricate, densely layered musical works crafted by juxtaposing dozens of minute sample loops, processed through myriad effects and MIDI patterning devices, all masterfully arranged using some of the most cutting-edge production technologies currently available on the DAW market.

In contrast to the abstract, experimental, and/or electroacoustic inclinations demonstrated by an artist like Figueroa and several other netlabel participants, Cerda’s work also runs parallel to the more popularly oriented, intelligent dance music (IDM) wing of the electronic music scene in Chile. Although incredibly unique, his productions tend to involve more common song structure formulas, underscored by steady, forceful rhythms that are equally suitable for the dance floor as for individual reception.³²

Complicating any hard and fast categorizations of the netlabel scene as an entirely amateur domain, Cerda’s musical practice also seems to approach or at least partially aspire to the more professional orbits eschewed by some of his netlabel cohorts. This is

³² This may be understood as somewhat of an inversion of Figueroa’s style, which tends to engage relatively simple techniques and technologies in the realization of highly experimental works.

true especially in relation to his career as a performer. So, even as he earns his living primarily through a string of itinerant employment opportunities (as comically insinuated in his bio on Pueblo Nuevo's website), and though he has expressed ideological commitments to maintain free access to his recorded works and to continue releasing music with Creative Commons licenses, he has still leveraged his musical talents to reach some fairly distinguished performance platforms.³³ Consequently, promoting this live performance career suggests an important inspiration for Cerda's contributions as a recording artist as well.

Nevertheless, given the range of techniques, styles, and motivations that distances and distinguishes the musical practice of José Manuel Cerda from those of Gerardo Figueroa, it is remarkable that both of these artists have published and/or contributed to works released through at least three of the same local netlabels (Pueblo Nuevo, Jacobino Discos, and Michita Rex). Their music thus circulates through similar social circles, while intersecting with many of the same art world circumstances. And it is for this reason that I examine Cerda's techniques and productions here in part to further emphasize the genuine diversity and fluidity of the netlabel medium in Chile, as well as the larger juxtaposition and cross-pollination of electronic music influences that it exemplifies.

In addition, however, my experience working with José Cerda offered key insights into the audio production program Ableton Live, which he uses as his primary compositional and performance platform. This DAW software in particular has revolutionized electronic music production in recent years. Therefore, I also use this

³³ These include a spot in the local lineup of Chile's first Lollapalooza festival in 2011, multi-site tours through Mexico and the U.S.A in 2013 and 2014, and a spot at the SXSW festival in Austin, TX in March, 2016.

vignette to further elucidate this creative tool – as well as its influence on music gestation in the local netlabel context – while highlighting the idiosyncratic ways Cerda steers it to accomplish his own inimitable musical ends.

When I first interviewed José Cerda a few weeks after the event referenced above, the Valparaíso native revealed the wit and dry sense of humor often reflected in the playful spirit of his music. He also shared several points of interest that helped to situate his creative practice within a wider frame. We met in a subterranean restaurant just across the picturesque Plaza Ñuñoa square from where he recently performed, and the interview began with a few casual jokes shared between us concerning the ironies of the surrounding establishment’s overtly nationalist and leftist-themed iconography.³⁴ As such, Cerda quickly demonstrated that while he may share ideological sympathies with many of his netlabel colleagues, he also conveys less political reverence than others. This disposition also extends to his music – to the extent that elsewhere he has described his work as such: “I am absolutely self-referential. Sure, I’m interested in social themes, but I’m afraid of falling into propaganda (lo panfletario), I am cautious of this, it gives me a little hesitation” (in Peirano 2010). Given the historical relationship between political commitment and nationalist musical expressions in Chile, this explains his reluctance to exploit these types of gestures as well.³⁵

With two album length productions released through two distinct Chilean netlabels – *Historial de Caidas* (Pueblo Nuevo 2010) and *Doble Ola* (Michita Rex

³⁴ For instance, together we comically pondered how Che Guevara might respond to the idea of having his beret-clad image emblazoned on the mass-produced t-shirts worn by the wait staff, among other amusing topics.

³⁵ He also explained, “Mine is not music of Chileanidad. It’s not important to me, the Chileans, the Argentinians, the gringos. Music is music, no more. Its good to have a little of where you are, but this identity is expressed in the music. It’s not necessary to wrap yourself in flags. Its there because all your life its been part of you” (Personal Interview, Santiago, 2/20/13).

2013),³⁶ ESDLCP, along with artists like Fukata (Michita Rex) and Gepe (Jacobino) stands among the most prominent national acts to emerge from this scene. However, as we discussed his approach to dissemination, Cerda further distinguished himself from other correspondents by disclosing a more nuanced consideration of the netlabel platform. On the one hand, like many associated with the larger netlabel community, he reflected a reticence to consider music as a commercial enterprise. In fact, it was Cerda who stated most emphatically, “My music is not a business,” when discussing the topic (see chapter III).³⁷ On the other hand, several of his comments also suggested his affiliation with netlabels relates to pragmatism at least as much as ideological conviction. He emphasized that in the wake of the major label exodus from Chile in 2000, and in relation to the more pop and *cumbia* oriented indie scene, there was simply no other place for music like his. For him, the netlabel platform served as the most efficient, DIY means to reach an expanded audience while maintaining artistic integrity and self-determination.

Incidentally, these same DIY sensibilities extend to Cerda’s musical training as well. Hence, while the majority of those interviewed for this investigation mentioned at least some instrumental musical background that preceded and informed their immersion in electronic music,³⁸ Cerda stated that, for the most part, he did not take an interest in music performance, let alone composition, until he began experimenting with various DAW software platforms around 2000.³⁹ Acquiring these programs through the various pirate exchange networks with which he was associated at the time, he related with a

³⁶ His output also includes countless contributions to compilations, and remixes of others’ work, released through these two labels, as well as through Jacobino, Epa Sonidos, and several others.

³⁸ For instance, some indicated that they had formal training in piano or other acoustic instruments, while others were self-taught instrumentalists, who transitioned to electronic music from previous experience performing in rock, metal, or punk ensembles.

³⁹ This would place him approximately in his mid-20s.

certain degree of pride how he taught himself to use this software “through practice,” and by gleaning information from magazines like *Future Music*, and *Computer Music* (Personal Interview, Santiago, 2/20/13).⁴⁰ This is significant, moreover, since he represents an entirely new generation of musical composers who have discovered musical creativity *entirely* through DAW software platforms.

Still, notwithstanding the creative motivations, ambitions, and experiences that distance Cerda from the wider netlabel community, it is important to note that his musical practice also demonstrates key commonalities with this musical field. This is true in relation to his reliance upon and mastery of DAW technology, as well as in regards to his affinity for sampling. It is also true to the extent that Cerda, like many netlabel participants, seems compelled to disseminate his works through this medium and in accordance with its ethos, at least in part, by the pay-it-forward impulse that often accompanies working with borrowed source materials (see chapter IV). In fact, speaking to this last concept, he confirmed: “My music is basically a species of remix. I manipulate a lot of music from others; and at the foundation remixing is this – a creative flow, in community” (Personal Interview, Santiago, 2/20/13).

Composing with Ableton Live

Although Cerda’s musical activity is fascinating in various respects, my most rewarding interactions with him, and those most pertinent to the larger arguments raised in this dissertation, arose through our discussions concerning the specific technologies and techniques that he uses in his compositional and performance practices. In fact, in a

⁴⁰ Inspired by IDM pioneers like Aphex Twin, he thus mastered an increasingly complex series of these programs, beginning with “Fruity Loops, ACID, Cubase, and these things,” before eventually turning to Ableton Live in the mid 2000s.

series of one-on-one sessions seated side-by-side at Cerda's desktop studio, he provided a crash course on the basics of working with his preferred software, Ableton Live.⁴¹ Even more importantly, he offered an indispensable behind the scenes view of his own compositional techniques with this program.

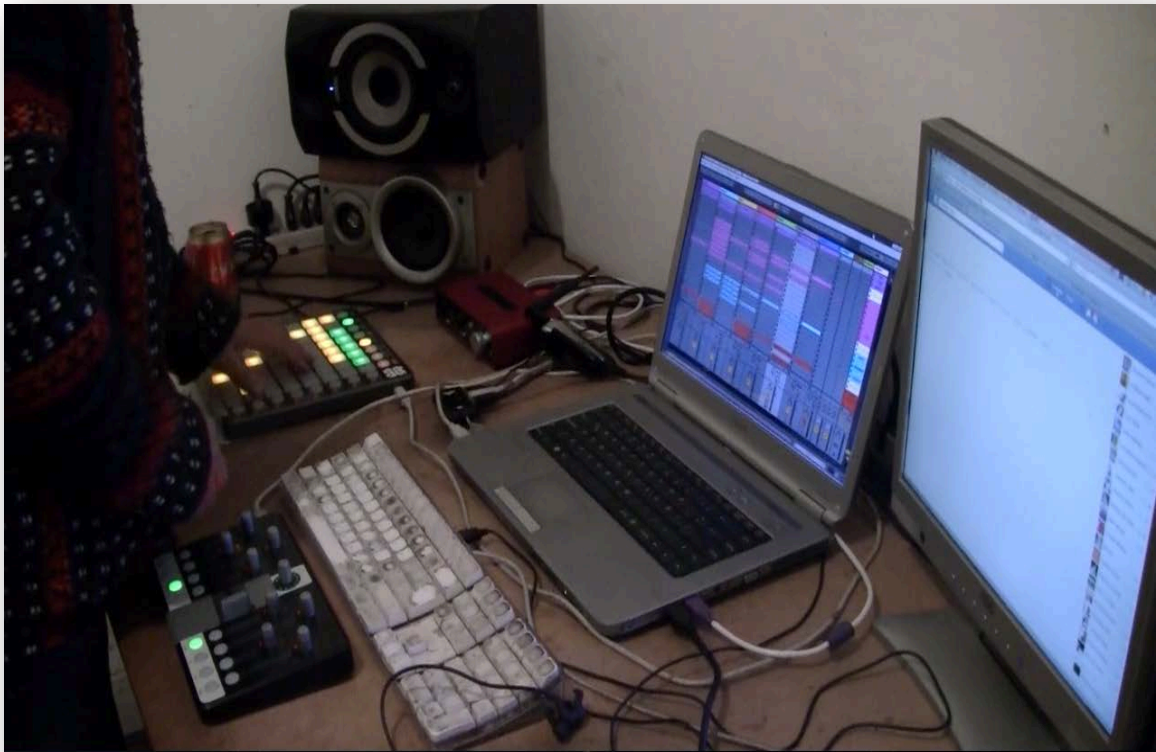


Fig. 5.6: José Manuel Cerda's desktop studio, with laptop displaying an Ableton Live session, a mixer in the lower left corner, and external MIDI device to control Live's functions situated above this.

To begin, the most important thing for the uninitiated reader to grasp about Ableton Live is the degree to which this software's designers have fundamentally optimized it to facilitate the practice of sampling – and especially the superimposed, looping, and commonly improvised genres of sample-based electronica created by artists like José Cerda. Live allows artists to effortlessly load innumerable samples into a

⁴¹ I later augmented these understandings through trial and error experimentations on my own and through similar instructions sessions with other artists.

composition session. Artists can then experiment with various combinations of these sample clips, replacing or further altering those that do not work well together, while organizing combinations that do into reusable templates.

On a more technical level, Live's layout features a dual window format that allows users to easily toggle between two interrelated 'views,' with each offering its own advantages for performance and compositional purposes.⁴² Among these, Live's 'arrangement view' (see Fig. 5.7) remains similar to the conventional format associated with long established DAW programs like Cubase and Pro Tools (see chapter IV). Here, time moves horizontally front left to right, individual tracks are layered vertically, and a series of cut and paste functions allow the artist to construct a more or less fixed musical presentation (or 'arrangement') for playback. For anyone experienced in using any of the most common DAW software programs, this layout should appear familiar, while its patterns of use should seem more or less intuitive.

⁴² Entire musicological investigations could and probably should be devoted to Ableton software and its creative implications alone. Indicative of its complexity, the program's instruction manual comprises 611 pages. Moreover, in an Ableton workshop hosted at the University of Michigan in 2015, a spokesperson noted that the company employs a full time employee whose sole responsibility is to curate and continually update this document.

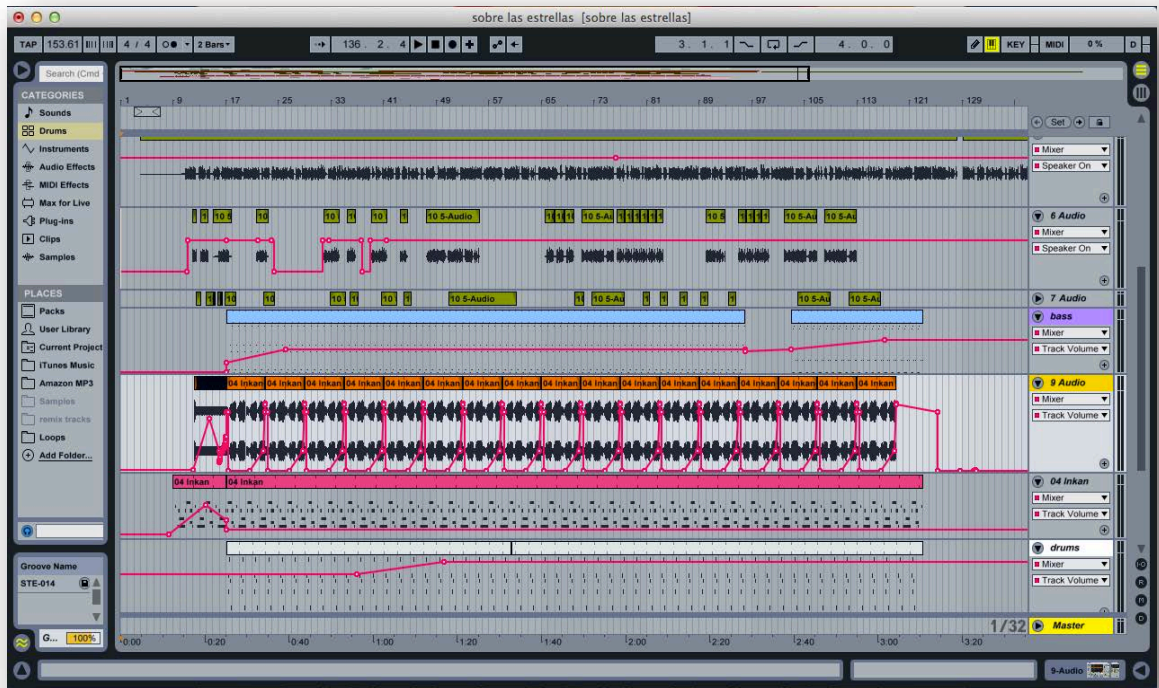


Fig 5.7: Ableton Live’s “Arrangement View,” displaying one of the author’s compositions. In this view tracks are layered vertically one over the other. These tracks, identified by name to the right of the screen, show recorded audio as wave formations – as seen here in the tracks marked “6 audio” and “9 audio” – or as MIDI patterns – as in the track marked “drum.” In the latter, MIDI information is used to program a virtual drum device included with the Ableton software to play a prescribed rhythm. Other MIDI tracks included here (i.e. ‘bass’ and ‘04 bukan’) have been programmed to control different virtual instruments.

Additionally, the vertical grid lines on the screen represent increments of time, while the red lines intersecting each individual track relate to indications of volume, on/off, panning, or any number of other parameters. Among countless other features this window also allows users to effortlessly cut and paste audio segments and to otherwise organize and arrange recorded sounds.

By contrast, Ableton’s ‘session view’ represents perhaps its most significant innovation, as well as its greatest distinction in relation to its competitors in the field. Especially designed to provide more opportunities for live performance, the ‘session view’ breaks with the DAW convention of horizontal and linear time arrangement. Here, individual tracks are juxtaposed from left to right, while time is treated with a more fragmentary and often cyclical sensibility that is not represented visually at all.

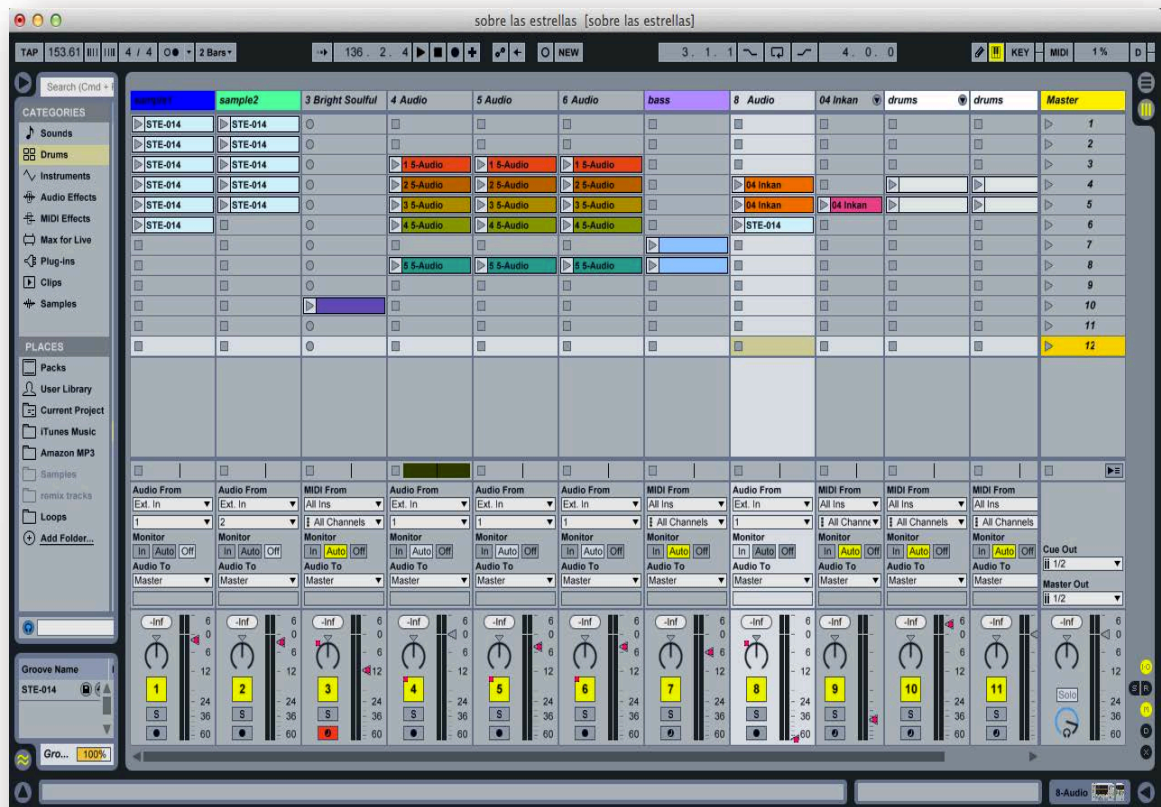


Fig. 5.8: Ableton Live’s “Session View,” which arranges individual tracks vertically while organizing combinations of audio ‘clips’ from distinct tracks into horizontal ‘scenes’ (see also Fig. 5.8). In this view, each colored box represents a clip that comprises either an individual audio sample or a MIDI pattern. Clicking on any clip causes that clip to play immediately. Clicking on a box in the scene column to the far right of the screen causes all clips included in that row to play simultaneously. Details of the levels and effects for each track are displayed at the bottom of this window.

This view further organizes sound in relation to cells or ‘clips’ of recorded (often looping) audio that may be played back, altered, and/or combined in myriad ways. In turn, artists may organize these clips into horizontal ‘scenes’ that allow an artist to trigger multiple clips of sound, assigned to distinct tracks, to play (or more commonly loop) in unison when all are situated in the same horizontal line of the grid (see Fig. 5.9). Commonly, scenes with contrasting combinations of cells are then arranged to lend a work a larger organizational template that may be used either for compositional purposes – i.e. to record a fixed audio arrangement into the “arrangement view” – or employed

more loosely in a live performance setting, where an artist may change the order of playback, juxtapose or ‘remix’ clips in different ways, or otherwise alter the fragments in real time to lend a piece a more improvisatory, ‘live’ sensibility.⁴³



Fig. 5.9: A close up depiction of the organization of tracks, clips, and scenes in an Ableton “Session View” window. The highlighted row indicates all clips that will play when the user of this track clicks on bow labeled “Verse1”(Ableton Live 9 Reference Manual 2016:38).

Significantly, these formatting and organizational functions all contribute to what several correspondents, including Cerda, have referenced as the “intuitive,” relaxed, and “playful” experience of working with samples within Ableton Live. Indeed, alluding to this quality in his praise of the program, Cerda explained:

I think it’s the best program that exists for musicians. Its not for recording [as in recording live instruments], there are other things like ProTools, that are more professional. But for composing and experimenting with music, and to record and play, it’s the best there is. It’s more direct. There’s a direct relationship between the creativity and the composition - at least for me, because I don’t play any instruments. Between the mind and the speakers, it’s a small space. (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/20/13).

This “direct,” “playful” sensibility, referenced by so many during my investigations in Chile,⁴⁴ correlates in large part with Live’s tendency to make subtle,

⁴³ Referencing this feature and its application for performance, Mika Martini explained, “what you have with Ableton Live – the thing that made me like it, and that many, many people in the world of electronica liked – is that you can play it live. You have your samples, and you can remake the track live. This is the fun thing about Live (Personal interview, Santiago 1/27/2013). I will add that these functions are not limited to samples either. An artist may just as easily juxtapose self-composed audio or MIDI clips in a similar fashion.

quantizing⁴⁵ corrections. These align sampled audio fragments – or any other audio contributions, including effects – in relation to what the program already senses as an evolving work’s undergirding rhythmic structure, or ‘groove.’ In other words, to paraphrase an Ableton spokesperson speaking at the University of Michigan in April 2015, Live does not just “spit out samples;” it tries to analyze them, to discover their tempo and their strong and weak pulses. This program’s coding situates audio samples in relation to similar information attributed to all other parts of a composition; and as such it “takes care of keeping things on the beat.”

This is important since this feature alleviates many of the tedious and time consuming issues previously associated with composing with sampled material – a significant factor that contributes to Ableton’s stated goal of “making Live easy and fun to use, yet at the same time capable of helping you create music with unlimited depth and sophistication” (Ableton Live 9 Reference Manual 2016:19). What is more, insofar as the experience of working with such a user-friendly program approximates creative ‘play’ at least as much if not more than it does creative ‘labor,’ one may again glimpse the evolving correlation between digital music production and the increasingly non-commercial means of dissemination chosen by netlabel artists like Cerda.

⁴⁴ For instance, as just one of many possible examples, Chilean producer and Ableton instructor Ricardo Luna, a.k.a. Tunacola, observed, “Ableton is capable of doing most everything that other programs can do, and it does it in a manner that’s like playful. So in my case it helps me musically to get ideas out... You know, compared to ProTools – ProTools is great, you can do anything in ProTools, but it has this interface, this way of interacting with it, it’s more engineered. There is nothing playful about it. It’s harsh” (Personal interview, Santiago, 5/24/13).

⁴⁵ ‘Quantization’ refers to a process common to DAW technologies, where audio information is automatically aligned to correspond to the underlying time structure of a work in progress. In most programs including Ableton, the degree of quantization is adjustable, operating on a spectrum that moves from a more loose temporal orientation to a more strict, metronomic, and some might say even robotic sensibility.

“Voluntad de Oro”

The most innovative characteristics of José Manuel Cerda work relate to his ability to use Live software to elicit intricate melodic, timbral, and textual qualities nearly entirely by appropriating and transforming preexisting audio fragments. As a result of these techniques, his compositions remain both familiar and alienating. They do not conceal the derivative and recombinatory nature of their genesis, nor do they require, or even aspire, for their admirers to recognize or appreciate the actual sources used in their creation. In fact, Cerda has stated that if listeners can decipher the actual origin of the samples that clearly contribute to his pop collage compositions, then he has failed in his creative endeavor.

Best defined as “microsampling,”⁴⁶ Cerda’s central stylistic approach involves extracting and manipulating small or even minute sample fragments from existing recordings that in turn transform into distinct melodies and textures in the context of a new work (Harkin 2010:180). What distinguishes this process from other forms of sampling is the extent to which these source materials become unrecognizable in comparison to their former character. Cerda voices his expressions – at least in relation to his audience⁴⁷ – not by juxtaposing and re-contextualizing audio quotations, or through post-modern artistic commentaries on preexisting expressions (as seen with Figueroa), but rather through the instrumental use of sampled source materials. These become akin to paint on a palette, ready to be reconstituted for purely aesthetic purposes (Ibid.).

⁴⁶ Notably, Cerda also adopts this term to describe his music.

⁴⁷ I will add as a caveat that just because an artist may obscure his or her source materials to the point that others cannot easily recognize their origins does not necessarily mean that these origins do not maintain significance for the artist him or herself.

To demonstrate these creative tactics, Cerda deconstructed several of his works in our observation sessions together at his computer. For the sake of brevity, here I consider a single example – a composition entitled “Voluntad de Oro,” included on ESDLCP’s Pueblo Nuevo debut, *Historial de Caídas* (Record of Stumbles) (2010).⁴⁸ I first offer a brief musical analysis of the track, followed by a technical analysis of the processes involved in its production.



Fig. 5.10: Cover art for El Sueño de la Casa Propia’s album *Historial de Caídas*. The collage pattern resonates with the fragmentary and juxtaposed nature of the album’s musical style.

To begin, “Voluntad de Oro” evolves through a series of staggered appearances and departures of fragmentary musical loops. It leads with its primary component (Sample 1 – see Fig. 5.11 below) – a jingly single-bar phrase, composed with a slightly off kilter dotted rhythm (d-d, c-f) that lends the track the cheerfully swaying, almost

⁴⁸ This track and the album *Historial de Caídas* may be streamed and/or downloaded in their entirety from: <https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/historial-de-caidas/> or <https://archive.org/details/pn058>.

stumbling sensibility maintained through much of its four-minute evolution.⁴⁹ After four solo repetitions of this introductory loop, a second cyclical phrase (Sample 2) fades into the mix (Scene 1 - 0:07). This four-note sequence, presented with a timbre reminiscent of piano, confirms the key (C Major), while complicating the rhythm. It presents two uncompleted eighth note triplets (triplet, triplet, rest) per bar that initiate a 6/8 against 4/4 *sesquialtera*-like pattern. Moreover, by transposing these repeated triplet fragments down a forth and then back between each measure (from g-a to d-e), Cerda further enforces the shuffling impression at the heart of the track.

At bar 12 (Scene 2 - 0:23), a percussion pattern enters the fold (Sample 3); and with it, the piece moves from its introduction to its body. Alternating between bass drum and clapping accents, the percussion loop suggests both the syncopated grooves and the acoustic timbre of the box-like *cajón* common in Chile and throughout Latin America. At this point, Cerda also replaces Sample 2 with a variation that fills in the rests of the triplet sequence to create an unbroken two bar phrase (Sample 2a). This arrangement proceeds without further embellishment for another eight measures.

At bar 20 (Scene 3 - 0:38), Cerda initiates a break in the track's momentum. The initial sample fades out, as the percussion track drops its claps and its cymbals to rest solely on its bass drum pattern (Sample 3a). Sample 2 remains as the sole focus of attention, though Cerda presents an additional variation of it (Sample 2b) – this time, stripped back to the uncompleted triplet pattern, now treated with a reverberating, psychedelic effect. In the background, the first murmurs of an unrecognizable voice also

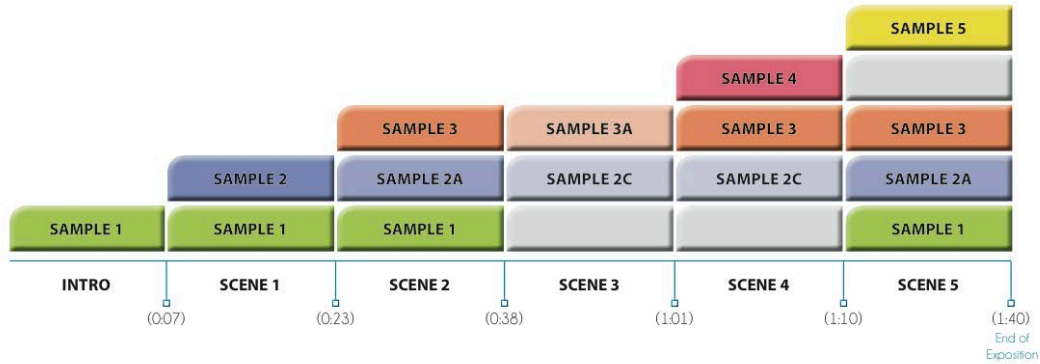
⁴⁹ Loosely translated as “Heart of Gold,” Cerda has explained how “Voluntad de Oro,” at least for him, signifies an ironic reference to precisely those human inclinations least likely to be associated with the term – i.e. laziness, self-centeredness. In light of this explanation, the off-kilter, stuttering nature of the tune seemingly takes on added significance.

appear, while the density and complexity of Sample 2b's reverberating effects slowly increase over a 12 bar interlude.

Picking up on the building anticipation hinted in the final bars of the preceding interlude, bar 32 (1:01) transitions to a four-bar bridge pattern (Scene 4), where in addition to the continuation of Sample 2b, the full complexity of the percussion loop returns. Most notably, the mumbling voice previously heard only faintly in the interlude breaks into a soaring measure-long vibrato pitch in an upper register (Sample 4). After four repetitions this gives way to what might best be considered the chorus or hook of the piece (Scene 5 1:10). Here, all components of Scene 2 return, including the jingly introductory sample. Now joining them are two elaborated and elongated vocal phrases, composed with indecipherable syllables, that together extend over four bars and serve as the apex of the work (Sample 5). These four bars repeat three times unaltered, and with the fourth cycle Cerda reduces the percussive emphasis of the claps and cymbals to transition back to a return of the Scene 3 interlude.

What might best be considered the exposition of Cerda's piece thus concludes approximately half way through the piece. From here, he cycles back through the various scenes, albeit with slightly varied combinations of the sampled components of the work. The return of the interlude section (Scene 3a) experiments with an alternate effect. The return of the bridge (Scene 4a) is elongated by a two bar, single quarter note 'glitching' repetition. Following an extended repetition of the (Scene 5a) chorus, Cerda closes the piece with a development section (Scene 6), where he first presents a previously unheard pennywhistle/violin sample, before playing with new combinations and new fragments extracted from of all the musical components introduced earlier in the work.

“Voluntad de Oro” – Exposition



* All samples repeat in loop for the duration of each scene.

The figure shows musical notation for five samples. Sample # 1 is a simple melody in 4/4 time. Sample # 2 (and 2b w/additional reverb effect) features a triplet pattern. Sample # 2a is a variation of the triplet pattern. Sample # 3 is a more complex melody with accidentals. Sample # 4 is a short melodic phrase. Sample # 5 is a rhythmic pattern consisting of repeated eighth notes.

Fig. 5.11: “Voluntad de Oro” samples and their varying combinations in organizational ‘scenes.’

Concerning the inner workings of “Voluntad de Oro,” Cerda explained in depth the various technical processes used in its composition in one of our sessions together. As I sat next to him at his computer, he opened the session view for this composition in Ableton Live, where arranged in its gridded coordinates lay a matrix of colored boxes corresponding to all the audio clips featured in the finalized track. He clicked on a few, isolating the various components, and for the first time the truly fragmentary and superimposed nature of the composition came into clear view.

I questioned Cerda about the origins of some of these musical fragments and he explained that the majority originated from the same unlikely source – folk artist Joni Mitchell’s “Blue” from the 1971 album of the same name. He demonstrated how Sample 2 and its variations corresponded to excerpts of Mitchell’s piano, while Samples 3 and 4 and a few additional audio clips featured in the development of “Voluntad de Oro,” originated from small segments of Mitchell’s voice. To further illustrate some of the techniques he used in manipulating this source material, Cerda then isolated the central vocal sample (Sample 5) featured in the chorus of his work. Pointing to the pitch transposition mechanism in the lower left hand corner of his screen he dropped the pitch several scale degrees to its point of origin. He released a retrograde function, reversing (or better yet, un-reversing) the sample to reveal Joni Mitchell’s now un-altered voice singing the words “Everybody’s saying that Hell’s the hippest way to go, well I don’t think so...” Finally, as if to confirm the digital plasticity with which he treats his source materials, Cerda moved the highlighted region indicating audio playback back and forth across the waveform representation of the audio sample, extending and contracting the length of the loop, and offering an additional indication of the near infinite possibilities of audio recombination that laid at his fingertips.

With this demonstration Cerda revealed a signature characteristic of his style. Despite relying heavily on this Joni Mitchell song for creative fodder in “Voluntad de Oro,” he so utterly recomposed this source material – through minute extractions, effects, and/or variations of tempo and pitch – that even if Mitchell herself were seated next to us listening to Cerda’s finished track, it would be unlikely that she could recognize any of her own contributions. Given this predilection for transformation, moreover, it is clear

that Cerda chose to extract fragments from this subdued ballad for his own bright and up-tempo work, not as an inter-textual reference he hoped his listeners would decipher or appreciate, but rather for purely pragmatic reasons, largely related to the isolated nature of the piano and voice in the original track.⁵⁰

Further still, the disassociation with which Cerda treats his samples in relation to their points of origin was again confirmed when I asked him where the primary sample (sample 1) that serves as the focal point of the entire “Voluntad de Oro” piece originated. With a puzzled look, he responded, “It’s a guitar from a psychedelic group from the 70s ... [but] I don’t remember [exactly what it is].” After then searching for a few moments through his sample folder he eventually found and played the original before illustrating how he had increased the tempo, changed the pitch, and added effects to make this sample entirely his own.⁵¹

Cerda’s approach to sampling leads from an aesthetic perspective that focuses on fragmentary aspects of his initial audio sources – i.e. the dotted rhythm of the initial sample in this example, the 6/8 melodic pattern of sample 2, or even something as basic as the underlying timbre of Joni Mitchell’s voice. In turn, the complexities of the music, along with its creative value, arise from the juxtapositions that bring these fragmentary qualities into conflict with one another in the context of an Ableton session. In “Voluntad

⁵⁰ This provided for clean samples, for instance, so that Cerda could extract vocal and piano melodies without corollary input from percussion, bass, or any of the other components usually encountered in popular music.

⁵¹ This is not to say, however, that Cerda’s approach to sampling is entirely devoid of contextual referencing. While this may be generally true in regards to his recorded works, a personal presentation of a work in progress that he offered me during a one of our meetings in August 2014 included an extended and obvious vocal sample from heavy metal icon Ozzy Osborne. This likely suggests, therefore, that Cerda’s proclivity for obscuring the origins of his popular music samples arises at least in part from fear of reprisals for copyright infringement. Moreover, while I raise this point as a footnote here, in the next chapter I will reconsider this issue in greater depth to illustrate the distinct possibilities for sampling promised by the Creative Commons alternative.

de Oro,” for instance, the superimposition of samples with opposing time signatures and opposing rhythmic structures lends the piece its fundamental rhythmic tension, in a way that would be difficult if not impossible to conceive and/or realize using the sequencing, synthesis, and/or composition mechanisms of more standardized, non-sampled based electronic music equipment and software. As Cerda explained, this contributes to what he defines as the “experimental” quality of his music. He often composes these works in a somewhat aleatoric fashion, ‘mashing’ disassociated samples together and transforming them until something catches his ear, before chiseling away at all additional components that do not sound as if they belong.

As a final point, the organizational functions of Ableton Live shape and expedite many of the structural qualities of Cerda’s music. In fact, in the analysis above, I label the various segments of Cerda’s “Voluntad de Oro” as ‘scenes,’ precisely because he organizes these segmented combinations of looping musical fragments as ‘scenes’ in the Ableton Live session with which he composed this work. Once compiled and organized as such, all the various components that constitute the interlude, or bridge, or chorus ‘scenes’ of this or similar works may be collectively summoned with the touch of a single button. This organizational function, in turn, tends to influence the composition and production of electronic music by encouraging familiar, symmetrical, and well-ordered patterns, like the succession of eight measure segments seen in “Voluntad de Oro.”

At the same time, this ‘scene’ function becomes all the more interesting in live scenarios like the one referenced at the beginning of this vignette. In more improvisatory settings like this, these combinatory scene structures frequently become dis-embedded from their “definitive” order, as Cerda rearranges and juxtaposes them, much as he does

with the myriad musical fragments that he uses to compile them in the first place. They become longer or shorter; they are transformed through alterations of effects or through the muting or amplification of this or that component. As hinted even in what I have labeled ‘the development’ of the “Voluntad de Oro” recording, in live settings, Cerda also steers his Live software to disassociate particular samples from the ‘scenes’ to which they correspond, in favor of new combinatory patterns that he creates in real time, simply by clicking any clip included anywhere in the session at any time.

* * *

In relating José Miguel Cerda and his music back to the netlabel movement and the broader themes of this dissertation, there are three key points I wish to emphasize. First, in progressing as an electronic musician with little financial investment and no formal musical education, Cerda exemplifies the “anyone can do this” concept referenced in the preceding chapter. His musical development has evolved hand in hand with a shifting art world milieu defined in large part by advances in the music production technology he uses. Yet the analysis of his music also suggests that even though these technologies may circumscribe his creative processes within a certain matrix of possibility and limitation, they do not determine his creative processes or negate the cultivation of a deeply personalized sense of style developed in partnership with them.⁵²

⁵² Notably, in my own musical circles I have often heard many traditional instrumentalists deride composition realized mostly ‘in the box’ of DAW technology as non-musicianship. This view commonly elevates instrumental practice, while suggesting that it the technology actually represents the master of this music, rather than an efficient and powerful musical tool. Some even within the netlabel community put forth a version of this argument, as they elevate the real-time manipulation of analog electronic instruments over DAW composition. However, as someone who has spent years as both an instrumentalist and as an aficionado DAW composer, I find this perspective somewhat vacant. While it is true, that DAW software may allow an aspiring aficionado to gain some proficiency quite quickly, just as with any musical practice, mastery of this technology takes time and experience.

Second, in working almost entirely with sampled source materials, José Cerda embodies the increasingly salient and somewhat revolutionary approach to musical practice that conceives recorded sound as a point of creative departure, rather than solely as a point of musical completion. He, like Figueroa and countless other netlabel artists, remains caught up with the transition to more interactive, read/write modes of creativity. Yet, unlike the quintessential read/write archetype, which appropriates in order to re-signify, Cerda inhabits an alternative, though no less important, branch of this burgeoning paradigm shift. To quote Paul Harkin, who has analyzed the work of electronic artists of a similar kilt, this branch corresponds to ‘auteurs’:

...who have defined and re-defined the use of the digital sampler; not primarily as an ideological or political tool or one limited to quotation, but as a digital music production tool and musical instrument which has expanded possibilities in the manipulation of recorded sound rhythms at both the macro- and micro-level as its technological capabilities have increased (2010:180).

Finally, even as some of Cerda’s more recent comments and actions suggest his musical career may be outgrowing the netlabel platform, in favor of more professionalized systems of support and diffusion, this medium presented him with an initial outlet to demonstrate and cultivate his compositional practices and to build an audience on his own terms. The music of ESDLCP has been propelled toward ever-larger audiences and performance venues precisely through its free circulation and word-of-mouth promotion. Consequently, Cerda’s trajectory serves as a reminder that the “share economy” model adopted and promoted by netlabels are not necessarily mutually exclusive to the professionalizing and commercializing models associated with the traditional culture industry – especially when the practical aspects of the former are disassociated from more ideological inclinations outlined throughout this dissertation.

Mika Martini

I began to use ethnic sounds, sounds that were Chilean or Latin American; I placed them into electronic music, in some way. And for this, I invented this name ‘Mika Martini,’ to create a personality, a person, a stranger from far away, coming to take sounds from here and place them in electronic music.

- Hugo Espinosa Chellew (a.k.a. Mika Martini, a.k.a. Frank Benkho) (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/27/13)

The present chapter concludes where the previous one began, with a final profile exploring the dynamic electronic compositions of producer, performer, graphic artist, and musical curator Mika Martini. While this artist’s creative practice and dedication to the cause exemplifies the promise of the Chilean netlabel movement perhaps more than any other individual participant in this study, this parallelism relates in no small part to the fact that as co-founder and director of the country’s largest and most prolific netlabel, Pueblo Nuevo, Martini, more than others, has been able to mold the local movement in accordance with his own aesthetic interests and social values. Nonetheless, even as Martini’s work with this organization alters the art world attendant to his own creative endeavors (and to those of countless others), this shifting context has played a significant role in feeding back to his creative practice, further enticing his already vanguard inclinations to ever-more experimental and far-reaching ends.

Since many of Martini’s experiences and motivations have already been divulged in the narratives of previous chapters, I proceed directly to the analysis of Martini’s music and to the technical and social processes involved in its realization. Among an excess of analytic perspectives that inform an understanding of Martini’s practice, I focus on three under-considered characteristics that speak to broader trends. These include: his attempts to inscribe his music with a sense of localism and place, his tendency to enhance

even his most personal productions with collaborative interactions, and his inclination to traverse traditional categorizations of electronic music in favor of more forward looking, hybrid experimentations. To illustrate these tendencies, I examine two of Martini's early netlabel releases – *Mestizo* (2007) and *Los Hanoish y Otras Subculturas Extintas* (2012), before concluding with a brief consideration of his more recent efforts under the alternate pseudonym, Frank Benkho.

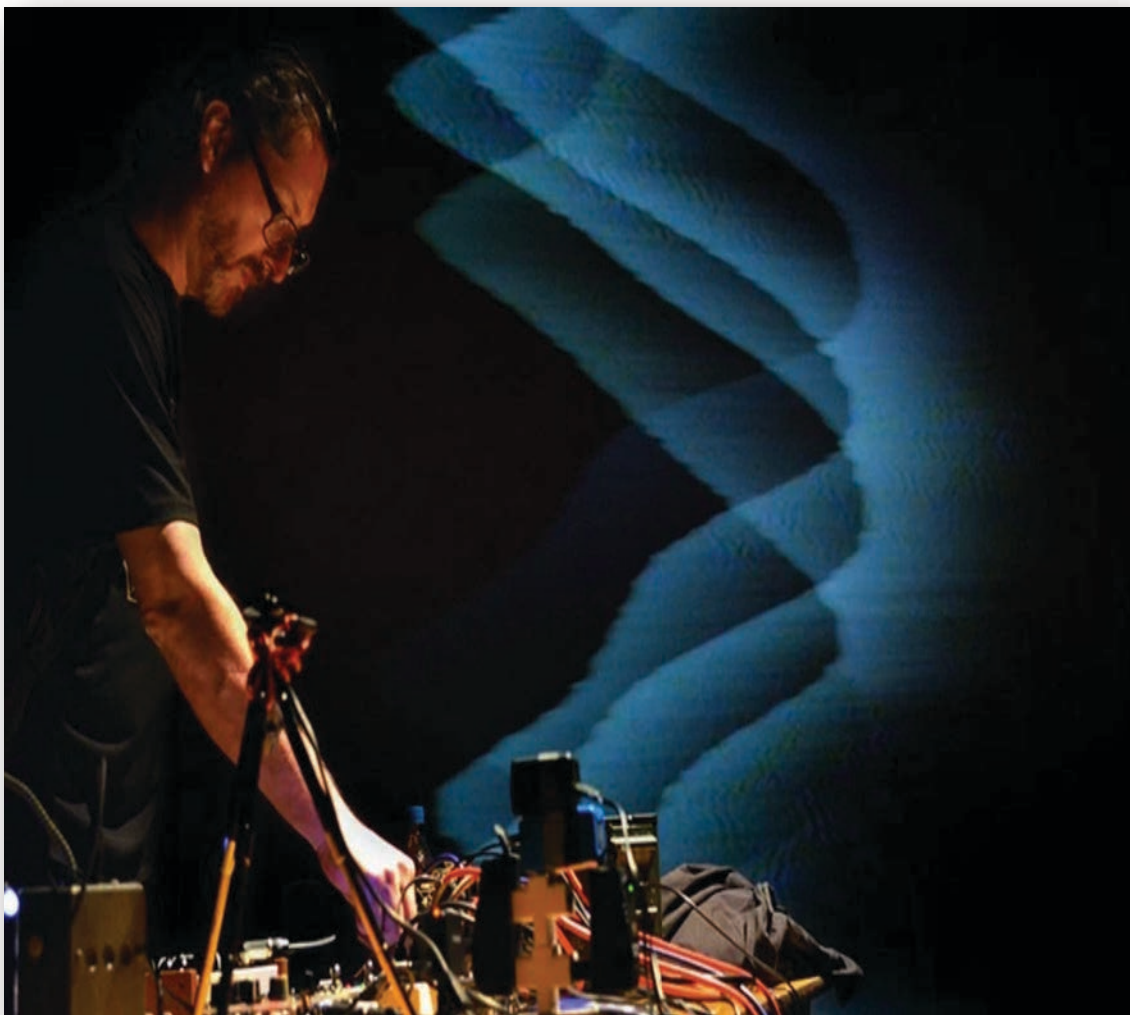


Fig. 5.12: Hugo Espinosa Chellew (a.k.a. Mika Martini) performing as his alternate alias Frank Benkho (Photo from Martini's Pueblo Nuevo Profile)

Mestizo

To begin, Mika Martini's solo debut *Mestizo*, released through Pueblo Nuevo in 2007, presents a stylistically and thematically integrated collection of pieces that blends characteristics of ambient and minimal electronica with idiosyncratic Andean rhythms, samples of indigenous Chilean languages and local soundscapes, and with haunting sonic allusions to the Andean *zampoña* (pan-flute) and other regional instruments.⁵³ As Martini described the work several years after its release:

This disc came from an era in which I made electronic music that was a little more traditional. It was danceable, with a beat, with melody and harmony. I was also immersing myself in the idea of integrating abstract electronica or 'minimal' with ethnic sounds from Chile... It seemed interesting to mix these two things – the electronic, the digital, the computer, the software, with the sounds of the *zampoñas*, the *quena*, the *ocarina*, the songs of the Mapuche, the voices of the Selk'nam..." (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/22/2013)



Fig. 5:13: Cover Art for Martini's *Mestizo*

⁵³ This may be freely streamed or downloaded in its entirety at: <https://pueblonuevo.cl/mestizo.htm>.

First and foremost, while the title '*Mestizo*' alludes to the recombinatory aesthetic that arises from this melding of cosmopolitan and vernacular sensibilities, Martini invokes a distinct Latin American identity as well. Much of the attraction of this album arrives, in turn, through Martini's attempts to reflect and contribute to this identity formation – and particularly to its Chilean variant – through the relatively nascent and undomesticated medium of electronic music.

Concerning the origins of this style, Martini acknowledged that his interest in cultivating a regional electronic music aesthetic developed partly in relation to ongoing conversations among the local electronic and netlabel communities. These debates, while questioning how to ascribe a national character to the local scene, and whether or not this even represents a worthy endeavor, confront a common “outsider” conception that electronic music exudes “emptiness,” and that the field as a whole “is superficial, lacking in real-world referents, mere escapism” (Reynolds 2009:555). For those artists like Martini who do attempt to ground what some might consider “rootless” electronic aesthetics with “real-world” sensibilities – whether through the inclusion of rhythms or instrumentation associated with a particular locality, or through the absorption of extramusical themes or iconography that express similar ties – this approach derives from the often-conscious desire to move the field in a new direction, to cultivate a new national, ethnic, or even “folkloric” electronica or electroacousticism.

At the same time, Martini's appeal to the vernacular reveals one of the more cosmopolitan implications of the netlabel movement as well – namely, the fact that as artists engage new media networks to immerse themselves in cultural flows that transcend their physical locality, many look to these same localities to establish markers

of distinction that may differentiate and create interest for their work within these translocal networks.⁵⁴ While this is true for several Chilean netlabel artists who I interviewed, Martini, in particular, recounted how he conceived his alias, as well as his style for *Mestizo*, directly in relation to this motive. He stated how the act, ‘Mika Martini’ (an alter ego of Hugo Espinosa Chellew), embodies an imaginary cosmopolitan entity, a foreign traveler from an unspecified point of origin, and noted how the album *Mestizo* represents the imagined impressions left on this journeying vagabond by his encounters with the local resonances of the Chile nation. Martini further clarified that his primary motivation for inventing this persona arose from his attempts to envision Chilean cultural traditions and ways of life as they might be seen and interpreted *from the outside*, while adding that for a Chilean to consciously invoke Chilean aesthetics for a Chilean audience alone just seemed “boring” (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/22/2013).

Concerning the music itself, *Mestizo*’s most obvious regional idiosyncrasy arrives with the characteristically Andean *zampoña* that Martini weaves throughout many of the album’s six tracks. Set adrift in the seemingly open space of upper registers, these breathy pan-flutes present a sparse melodic accompaniment to the dense mechanized rhythms that occupy the low end of the mix. The resulting texture, at once striking and unusual, stands out even in the context of the Pueblo Nuevo catalog, where despite a diversity of styles many contributions still rely entirely on synthesized sonorities.

⁵⁴ In their book *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (2000) anthropologist Daniel Miller and economist Don Slater have observed similar trends beyond the field of music. Exploring the ways Trinidadian citizens navigate the various technologies, and the “diverse real-world locations” that together comprise the Internet, their work documents, “how members of a specific culture attempt to make themselves a(t) home in a transforming communicative environment, how they can find themselves in this environment and at the same time try to mould [sic] it in their own image” (1).

Beyond aesthetics alone, however, Martini invokes the *zampoñas* for their symbolic associations as well. He employs them, on the one hand, as a sonic icon of the Andean indigenous communities (and by extension the Andean region) from whence they originate. In this way, serving as a melodic protagonist, juxtaposed within an industrialized soundscape of mechanized beats and synthesized harmonies, this instrument's presence insinuates co-existence. It symbolically advocates a place for indigenous identities and life ways *within* modernity, and not, as is so often the case, as a sign of antiquity – or even worse, “backwardness.” On the other hand, Martini incorporates this and other folkloric instruments in much the same way that the *nueva canción* and *canto nuevo* artists of previous generations did (see chapter II) – as a nationalist sign, as a counterhegemonic reference to a “domain of sovereignty,” existing outside dominant economic and political paradigms (Chatterjee 1993:6), and, by extension, as an index to the ideals of the political left.⁵⁵ While Martini's skillful use of this sonority alone helps to distinguish his work in an international field, it expresses sympathies for the progressive political movements that have become indelibly intertwined with the Chilean netlabel movement (see chapter III).

Along with the *zampoñas* and other local instruments that inflect this work, Martini further invokes regional sensibilities by assimilating into the very structures of his electronic compositions integral characteristics of local folkloric genres. Extending beyond the ‘psuedo-individualization’ of cosmopolitan electronica, and toward the cultivation of a truly pioneering subset of the genre, this approach becomes particularly apparent on *Mestizo*'s fourth track, “Whyno?”

⁵⁵ Of course, the *zampoñas* and other regional folkloric movements have become all the more associated with leftism precisely because of their significant historical ties to *nueva canción* itself, and to Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular regime.

Within the title “Whyno?” Martini encapsulates a sly double entendre. The Anglicized term represents a thinly veiled reference to the Andean *huayno*, whose name shares a similar pronunciation, even as the interrogative punctuation underscores, a spirit of enquiry, possibility, and experimentation. Each of these meanings also reflects in its own way the internal dynamics of the composition, so that while musical analysis and Martini’s own comments reveal that certain characteristics of the traditional genre served as key organizational principles for the work, the composer’s willingness to experiment with these conventions in the context of electronica grants it a unique significance.

To first offer a point of reference, the Andean *huayno*, like many Latin American genres, incorporates a *sesquialtera* rhythm, wherein a 6/8 pulse is superimposed over a 4/4 meter. Typically, the melody emphasizes the 4/4 pulse, while an arpeggiated bass line fluctuates subtly between an eighth-and-two-sixteenth-note rhythm and an eighth-note-triplet feel within a simple duple meter (Turino 2008). Further characterized by their bimodality, *huaynos* also fluctuate between major and minor, often beginning their phrases in the former and cadencing in the latter (Ibid.).

Admittedly, Martini’s “Whyno?” deviates from these traditional conventions so severely that most listeners familiar with the genre might easily overlook the association altogether (at least without the hint offered in the title). Yet still, closer inspection reveals that the *huayno*’s basic rhythm and its bimodality do play significant roles in defining many of the piece’s unusual sensibilities.

Martini’s piece begins, for instance, as a solitary electronic synthesizer, drenched in delay and reverb, gradually emerges from silence playing a F#m chord in triplets with accents marking a duple meter (see transcription in Appendix I). Serving as a central

rhythmic gesture, this accented triplet pulse presents a clear distinguishing feature within a genre that generally conforms to strict 4/4 metric rhythms. Also, it establishes the sensation of a 6/8 pulse that begins to hint at the rhythmic foundations of the *huayno*, even as Martini achieves this pulse not through the repetition of arpeggios, but rather through the recurrence of a relatively static harmonic pattern.

Proceeding through a series of staggered entrances – a convention familiar to electronica, the track continues to evolve as Martini adds to the reoccurring harmonic accompaniment first a sparse *zampoña* melody and then multiple layers of electronic and acoustic percussion, intermittently embellished by various effects. At this point, the key juxtaposition of the 4/4 and 6/8 pulse common to the *huayno* also appears, although unlike the folkloric genre, which arrives at this pattern through contrasting melodic and harmonic patterns, “Whyno?” produces a similar effect, most notably, through a disparity between its triplet harmonic rhythmic pattern and a standard 4/4 drum beat.

Intriguingly, the modal quality of the *zampoña* melody, with its prominent reliance on the augmented 6th and the common resolution of its phrases with a major 3rd further recalls the bimodality of the *huayno*. Yet, while this characteristic plays a major role in establishing “Whyno’s” peculiar exoticism (at least as experienced from an outside perspective), Martini inverts the traditional convention by drifting from minor to major instead of the opposite motion found.

And lastly, although the first section of the piece takes place over the static F#m chord, at the 1:20 mark Martini introduces a repeating three chord harmonic progression that moves from F#m through Bmaj to Emaj over two measures. Once introduced this progression forms the harmonic movement that drives the development of much of the

rest of the piece. This is significant since this progression emphasizes the bimodality of the piece as it moves from the tonic to the dominant of the relative major. It is also significant insofar as it presents yet another skewed though perceptible reference to the original inspiration by vaguely recalling the arpeggiated nature of the traditional *huayno* bass line.

In sum, Martini's "Whyno?" poses a question to its audience. It challenges them to ponder whether or not this electronic work might qualify as, or at least be recognized for its similarities in relation to, an actual *huayno*. At the same time, Martini offers his own playful response, "why not?" In this way, this composition and the *Mestizo* album as a whole also reflect a broader proclivity that has become increasingly apparent among the Chilean electronic music community, and particularly among those artists tied to the Pueblo Nuevo netlabel. Like Martini, many in these creative communities infuse their electronic musical works with references to Chilean cultural traditions, although rarely in a straightforward manner. Rather, these national signs and traditions become re-oriented, re-contextualized, and re-imagined through avant-garde techniques that reflect a broader socio-political trend emerging within the progressive community in Chile – namely, the dedication to "imagining" new alternatives for the future of the nation (Coronil 2011, see also chapters I and III).

Along with his attempts to translate and/or adapt to the medium of electronica the traditions of the Andean region, Martini's work on *Mestizo* remains worthy of consideration for the technical and collaborative means involved in its creation as well. Working entirely with Ableton Live in constructing this album, he, like both José Cerda and Gerardo Figueroa, relied heavily on the use and manipulation of samples. Yet

Martini's compositional approach with this album, and his use of samples, remains somewhat distinct, insofar as he collected his source material through deeply collaborative networks of creative exchange that underscore some of the highest ideals of the netlabel movement.

Take for example the *zampoñas* that constitute such an important presence on *Mestizo*. Despite their seemingly authentic acoustic timbre, Martini initially acquired these sounds as samples from his close friend and Pueblo Nuevo colleague Rafael Cheuquelaf of the Punta Arenas duo Lluvia Acida (See chapters I and III). In fact, in beginning to conceive the concept and the aesthetic of this album, Martini reached out to Cheuquelaf, asking him to record just a few basic notes on his *zampoñas*. The latter enthusiastically complied, returning electronically to Martini in Santiago the resulting tones as digital files. Martini then programmed these samples into a MIDI track of an Ableton Live session, wherein he organized and transposed the original sounds to record many of the windswept melodies that decorate *Mestizo*.

Martini's exchanges with Cheuquelaf, from whom he also acquired samples of additional regional instruments like *ocarinas* and *quenás* that he used in similar ways, represented only the beginning, however. As I sat next to Martini at his computer, he demonstrated how a reverberating loop that actually sounds more like a jaw harp in the "Whyno?" recording – while serving as both a key counter melody and counter rhythm throughout the piece (and on other works on the album) – actually originated from a *cuatro* sample that Martini borrowed from another musician friend, Michel Durot.⁵⁶

Likewise, he played a series of augmented acoustic guitar chords that constitute a central

⁵⁶ As part of the lute family, the *cuatro* is small stringed instrument, most commonly consisting of eight or ten strings, arranged in four or five courses. It found throughout Latin America, although it is particularly associated with Venezuela.

feature on Mestizo’s second track “Matorrales,” while noting how these originated with a musician colleague named Felipe Cadenasso of the rock group Matorral – a collaboration cleverly acknowledged in the track’s title.⁵⁷

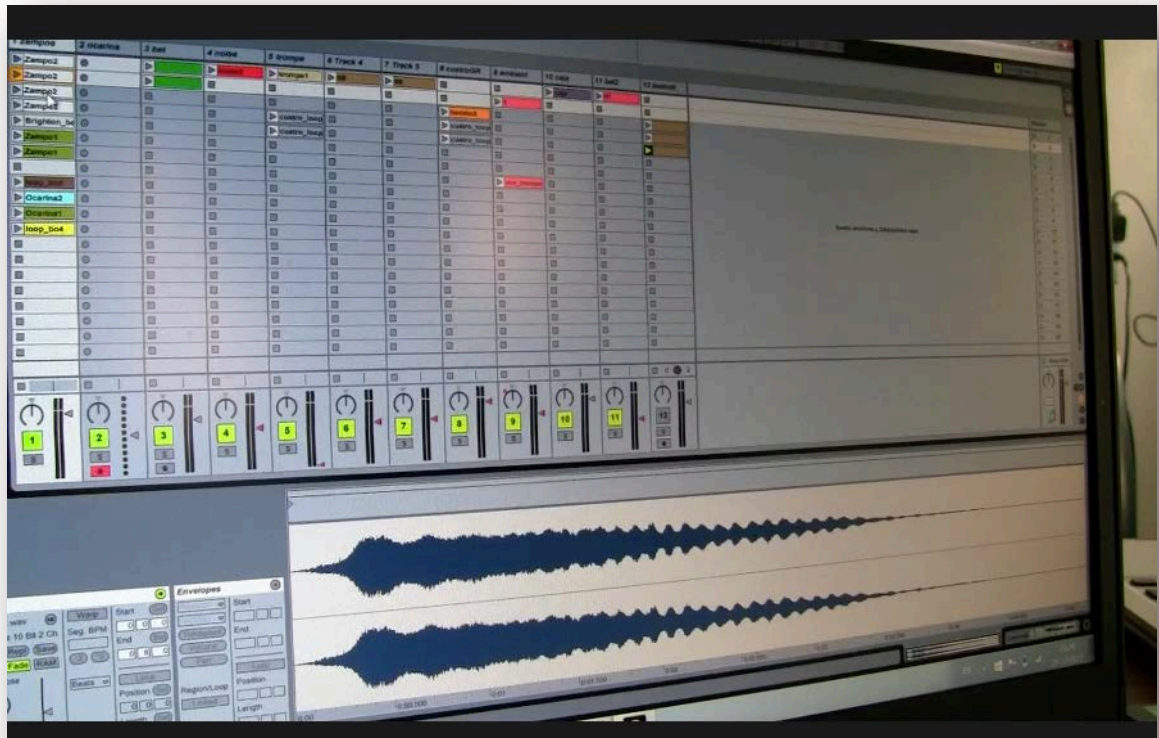


Fig. 5.14: Ableton Live “Session View” for Martini’s “Whyno?” The depiction in the bottom right corner displays the wave formation for one of Rafael Cheuquelaf’s original *zampoña* samples (the initial attack and lingering vibrato are clearly visible). To left of this are the parameters for all the various effects Martini used to alter this sample. Above Martini has arranged various clips that transpose this initial sample. By clicking each in turn, Martini constructed the melody of the piece. In performance, he can also improvise new melodies by reordering and manipulating these same audio components.

Numerous samples collected by musicologist and sound archeologist José Perez de Arce also appear throughout Martini’s album. These sounds, initially published as part of Perez de Arce’s sound archive/creative project *Son-Idos*, include the voices of various

⁵⁷ The Spanish term *matorral* refers to the scrub brush vegetation found throughout Chile’s central valley. This title thus offers acknowledgement of a contribution to the artist of the same name, while highlighting the regional associations of the works as a whole.

indigenous speakers from Chile's Mapuche, Yagán, and Aymara populations, as well as instrumental and soundscape samples collected from in and around their communities (see also chapter III). As adopted for *Mestizo*, these samples add to the album's amalgamated aesthetic as well as to its unusual sense place. From a technical standpoint, to adopt a term defined by Abrose Field (2000), they further contribute to the "transcontextual" nature of the album.⁵⁸ Yet in addition to this, these samples are significant in relation to the nature through which they were acquired.

Martini described visiting Perez de Arce at his office in the Museum of Pre-Columbian History to ask his permission to use these samples in person.⁵⁹ Likewise, he noted how he requested permission to use all the rest of the previously existing samples included on *Mestizo* as well. In the liner notes of the album, Martini also clearly acknowledged all contributing parties, including those involved in mixing the album and creating its visual artwork, and those who contributed the three remixes included with the initial release. In this way, he thus publically celebrated the respectfully collaborative nature of the disc, while *sharing* credit for the album ultimate success. What is more, he presented this work with a *recognition/ non-commercial/ share-and-share-alike* Creative Commons license, as an invitation for others to continue a similar chain of borrowing.⁶⁰

As a final word on *Mestizo*, Martini's own words summarized it best:

⁵⁸ This is true insofar as Martini uses these sounds initially "recorded from the real world" in order to build "a montage of materials," wherein certain sounds lend others new meaning, and through which the composer may directly allude to, represent, or subvert reality (Field 2000:37).

⁵⁹ According to Martini, Perez de Arce's response to this request was, "Ok, perfect, use it, its free for this." My own interactions with Perez de Arce also confirmed his enthusiasm for this project.

⁶⁰ This proposition has led, in turn, to the inclusion of *Mestizo* tracks on several international compilation albums, and to the realization of the compilation album *Mestizo Retoco* (Pueblo Nuevo 2009), which includes remixes of *Mestizo* tracks produced by over a dozen colleagues and collaborators. <http://pueblonuevo.cl/mestizo-retocado.htm>

This was a collaborative disc. Many people contributed sounds for it. And with all these sounds it's a grand collage – 'Mestizo' in the sense of mixture, the digital with the analog, the electronic with the ancestral... It was an interesting experiment to expand the original idea of Pueblo Nuevo. With Pueblo Nuevo, at the moment we began, we were thinking of doing this. People would rescue things from here [Chile], make them new. And this was my most pure contribution to this concept. (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/22/2013)

Los Hanoish y Otras Subculturas Extintas and the Frank Benkho Project

In the near decade since the release of *Mestizo*, Martini's musical trajectory has been one of continual evolution and constant experimentation. From the absorbing and groundbreaking (through somewhat formulaically conventional) electronica of his debut, Martini passed through phases of interest in abstract and structurally unbound electroacousticism, arriving most recently at a chapter of his musical career marked by truly pioneering explorations of the intersections between all branches of electronic music/sound design.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the international netlabel movement, while attracting exploratory and experimental impulses in the first place, has been absolutely essential in providing the institutional chrysalis necessary to further catalyze such creative metamorphoses. In fact, in our conversations Martini explicitly acknowledged that the innovations of style and affect apparent in his music could not have been possible without the opportunities and social networks supported by the netlabel phenomenon. I conclude this chapter with two examples that provide further evidence of this tendency, and that represent well Mika Martini's creative output over the last several years.

First among these, the follow up album to Martini's debut, entitled *Los Hanoish y Otras Subculturas Extintas* (The Hanoish and Other Extinct Subcultures) and released

through Pueblo Nuevo in 2011,⁶¹ shares with *Mestizo* both the influence of collaborative interactions and an interest in the multifaceted history of indigenous Chilean culture. In terms of style, however, apart from its similar dependence on electronic sonorities, the more recent work could hardly be more distinct in relation to its predecessor.

Representing a clean break from his former, nearly decade long liaison with beat driven electronica, Martini abandons with *Los Hanoish...* all intimations of rhythm, melody, conventional form, and even definite pitch. Rather, the composer recalled this album as, “my first approach to the electroacoustic. My first idea to do something free – you know, free in the sense of no structures, no beat” (Personal interview, Santiago 5/18/2013).

In relation to its sound design, the eight pieces included on *Los Hanoish...* defy all attempts at standard transcription. They comprise glitches, rushing waves of electronic distortion, piercing high-pitched resonances, bell-like reverberations, deep booming drones, and all manner of clashing, clanking, scratching, scraping, and/or wailing sonic vibrations. Martini, in turn, organizes, juxtaposes, and transforms all of these sounds in seemingly aleatoric fashion, constructing impressions or soundscape vignettes, rather than melodic or harmonic arcs. The result, from the listener standpoint, is a series of often eerie, even unsettling sensations – enforced all the more by the cryptic, seemingly corpse-like image that serves as the album’s cover art.

⁶¹ This is available to stream and or download in its entirety at: <http://pueblonuevo.cl/hanoish.htm>.



Fig. 5.15: Cover art for *Los Hanoish y Otras Subculturas Extintas*.

Much like *Mestizo*, the techniques Martini used in creating his sophomore release are fascinating as well. Again, he conceived and realized this work primarily through collaboration with Rafael Cheuquelaf and Hector Aguilar of Lluvia Acida. The concept began in 2009 when Lluvia Acida released their remarkable project *Kuluana* (referenced briefly in chapter III) – a collaborative work in its own right that combined ambient electronica with stories told by Ursula Calderon, the last known living speaker of the indigenous Yagán language. In preparation for the album’s release through Pueblo Nuevo, Cheuquelaf sent a preliminary mix to Martini, requesting him for help in removing a hiss from the recordings of Calderon’s speech. Martini in turn employed an

Ableton Live plugin called ResoNoise – created by yet another Pueblo Nuevo collaborator and sound engineer, Daniel Nieto – that enabled him to isolate and eliminate the noise. From this point of origin, however, Martini explained how this process provided the germ of an entirely new project.

So the plugin has the bonus of hearing what you take out. So this is sonority [In the interview Martini plays a recording of a distorted, distant sounding speech], made in language of the Yagán from the voice of Ursula Calderon, this sounded like incredible material. It's a piercing voice, very strange. So I said to Rafael, "It's a version of *Kuluana*, but a version b, side b. It's the same material that you gave me but flipped.' So what I did was to record this strange voice, that's like the negative of the [original] recording; and after I put it in Ableton Live. At this point, I also put the recording through a type of additional processing [Martini then plays the extracted noise clip with effects that render it nearly incomprehensible as speech]. It's a negative of *Kuluana*. (Personal interview, Santiago, 5/9/13)

As Martini continued to explain, he derived all but one of the tracks on *Los Hanoish...* from this same source material. Consequently, the individual pieces represent what he called "variations." He manipulated each one with different effects – transposing, distorting, and otherwise altering this "negative imprint" of Lluvia Acida's *Kuluana*, often to produce works recorded in real time with minimal postproduction. To these pieces Martini affixed provocative titles like "Los Rios Subterranos de Chipanzitango (The Subterranean Rivers of Chipanzitango)" and "El Ultimo Rito de la Cultura Calcarea (The Last Right of the Calcarea Culture)" that imagine civilizations lost entirely to contemporary memory. In our conversations, moreover, Martini further related this technique to an important philosophical perspective concerning the legacy of Chile's actual indigenous traditions.

[I began by] using the voice of Ursula Calderon, in this Yagán language, of which the majority of Chileans don't understand anything ... They don't recognize it, many don't even have a reference ... They don't know the culture of the Yagán,

they don't know this language exists. So [with the idea of this album], the Hanoish would be an imaginary civilization that represents a little of this lack of awareness that people have in relation to their ancestral cultures... You know you can hear some singing of the Mapuche, you can read about the indigenous [ways of life], but no one really understands what happened with them or where they came from. Always, it's a reinterpretation... So this work, it's the noise in the background, it's like what it's like to hear what remains of these cultures. It's like a sonic reunion... This noise is the distant memory of this culture.

Hence, much as with *Mestizo*, Martini's second album represents an intriguing commentary on the complex dynamics of contemporary Chilean society. Highlighting the collaborative ideals of the netlabel movement, moreover, Martini realizes this commentary in large part through collaborative conversation with the work of Lluvia Acida, who released their album with a Creative Commons license precisely so that others might freely and respectfully produce derivative works with a similar spirit. Yet still, the incredibly experimental and intellectually demanding nature of this work warrants additional emphasis.

To offer some perspective, as a fan of Martini's electronica debut, I must admit that my first impressions of *Los Hanoish*... were largely negative. I found it confusing and harsh, a betrayal of my expectations for a reprisal of his former style. In fact, only after several years, and after acquiring both a more seasoned understanding of electroacoustic aesthetics and of Martini's underlying purpose for this work, have I come around to a greater appreciation. What is more, Martini recounted similar stories told to him by others, including some fairly prominent members of the Chilean electronic/electroacoustic scene, who also initially dismissed this work, only to recognize its values after additional contemplation.

In light of these circumstances, Martini's willingness to challenge and disrupt his listeners' expectations, while bearing the brunt of his album's mixed reception, reflects

one of the fundamental benefits of netlabel affiliation – that is, the opportunity to play with new ideas, to experiment with new techniques, and to cultivate entirely unfamiliar aesthetics, without needing to consider the consequences of failure. This is significant, moreover, insofar as the openness to the possibility of failure represents a key ingredient for the development of a healthy, creative, and progressive modern musical culture (Ballantine 1983:131).

Innovation requires an artist, at times, to risk alienating and/or losing his or her audience; and in contrast to their commercial counterparts, non-commercial venues like netlabels provide a much more nurturing and forgiving environment for such groundbreaking tendencies.⁶² They allow artists to risk failure, with the understanding that they can go on experimenting until something connects – or not. And indeed, this is all the more true when non-commercial distribution strategies intersect with collective and collaborative network of creative individuals, who maintain a mutual commitment to at least consider each others works, even if they may not find every contribution immediately appealing.

This experimental trajectory brings me to a final consideration of Martini's musical evolution. In August 2011, when we first met, Martini was already in the process of developing an entirely new project under the freshly minted alternate alias, Frank Benkho.⁶³ As he related, this project would discard the various trappings and conventions of computer-based composition altogether. Instead, he intended to incorporate primarily

⁶² In the commercial arena, for instance, failure brings consequences that extend beyond the realm of appreciation. It affects livelihoods, contracts, and relationships, and in all these ways, it influences the potential of the artist to go on making art in a similar way in the future. As a result, these contexts all too often present an impediment to the innovative impulse as they encourage artists to hedge the urge to break new ground with the necessity to please.

⁶³ The original Franz Benkho, whom Martini honors with his alternate alias, was an experimental composer, musical director, and sound engineer, recognized in part for his production work on many of the recordings for the DICAP label (see also http://www.premiospulsar.cl/2016/portfolio_page/franz-benko/).

analog technologies that he could manipulate in real time in order to present improvised audio/visual performances (see chapter I for a description of a Frank Benkho performance).

Martini cited various reasons for this transformation. On the one hand, he felt that DAW programs had become so ubiquitous in electronic music, and that certain aesthetic conventions and technical routines associated with these technologies had become so commonplace, that they had already become an impediment to further innovation – at least for him. On the other hand, Martini also felt that electronic music, in many instances, had lost its performative edge, as many artists seemed isolated from their audiences, trapped behind computer screens, while offering few physical gestures worthy of observation during the actualization of their compositions.⁶⁴

Conceived as an alternative, Martini’s ‘Frank Benkho’ project thus eliminated the computer as a performance instrument altogether.⁶⁵ This project presented, in Martini’s words, an “old school” approach to electronic music, through its heavy reliance on an extensive array of vintage and rare analog equipment. In concert, this project would offer spectacle as well, not only through the accompanying “visuals” projected onscreen, but more importantly through Martini’s physical movements, which would more obviously correspond to the actual audio transformations taking place in the music.

The musical expressions that have emerged in this way remain germane to discussion initiated above to the extent that they reflect and benefit from the entire

⁶⁴ I should note that Martini is not alone in expressing this concern with digital technology. Nor is he alone in looking to vintage, analog electronic hardware as a possible solution.

⁶⁵ For his recordings as Frank Benkho, Martini still uses computer software (mainly Ableton Live) to record and for limited postproduction purposes. However, he renders the actual audio for these recordings, in large part, through real-time performance, in much the same way as he realizes his performances in live settings.

experimental ethos that has nurtured Martini's recent artistic development. Indeed, Martini infuses his performances as Frank Benkho with elements of all his previous musical endeavors and explorations. Even as these performances generally avoid the standardized drum machine rhythms of his early electronica, for example, they do incorporate fragments of melody, harmony, and even Martini's own effects-laden voice in ways that recall his previous work with this genre. Likewise, while abandoning the most abstract, structure-less, and even harsh aspects of his electroacoustic experiments, Martini still employs, as Frank Benkho, a heavy dose of indefinitely pitched electronic sonorities, complex textures, and uncommon and evolving forms that recall this phase of his development as well.

All these experimentations have resulted in a creative project that is truly unique, and one that can easily share performance bills with electronica and electroacoustic acts alike (as is often the case). By all accounts, Martini's efforts as Frank Benkho have also been met with considerable critical and popular recognition, both locally and internationally. This success has led to increasingly notable opportunities both for performances, and for the wider distribution of his recordings. In fact, in large part due to his efforts to expand his audience outside Chile, and to explore the creative possibilities of distinct audio media, Martini released his last two masterpiece albums under the Frank Benkho alias – *The Revelation According to Frank Benkho* (2014 on vinyl and CD) and *A*

Trip to the Space Between (2016 on CD)⁶⁶ – through the Dutch label Clang, consequently placing his work in a European orbit and introducing him to new audiences.⁶⁷

Still, it is important to note that while Martini's musical evolution – much like that of José Cerda referenced above – has expanded beyond the limits of his netlabel affiliation in certain respects, his commitments to this movement remain strong. He continues to lead Pueblo Nuevo, and in 2016 his efforts for this organization have arguably been more vigorous than ever. He also continues to release works through the medium in a variety of styles, both as an individual and as member in various collaborations.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it is important to recognize that while ultimately propelling his career towards a somewhat more professional plane in certain respects, it was Martini's affiliation with the netlabel movement that provided the context for the creative development that gave rise to this success. It allowed him to experiment with new techniques, to experience trial and error, to receive creative feedback in a nurturing and encouraging environment, and to cultivate a style over time that likely could not have been imagined, let alone realized and appreciated, in any other way.

* * *

In summary, the three case studies shared in this chapter demonstrate the incredible diversity associated with the Chilean netlabel movement. They illustrate the varying intersections of style, technique, and purpose that have given rise to the netlabel phenomenon, along with those that have further evolved under its wing. At the same

⁶⁶ I should note here that while Martini did offer his two albums through Clang as commercial releases, this may seen in large part as a necessity to recoup the costs related to the physical nature (Vinyl/CD) of these artistic endeavors.

⁶⁷ This circumstance has offered Martini an opportunity to draw additional outside attention to the Pueblo Nuevo netlabel as a whole as well.

⁶⁸ For example, Martini released an album entitled *Muelle Prat* under his original alias and through the Valparaíso-based label Easonidos in 2015. That same year, he also released another critically-acclaimed album with the trio C/VVV through the Jacobino Discos netlabel.

time, these profiles highlight a few of the commonalities that tie netlabel affiliation into a discernable movement as well. Indeed, in this regard, Gerardo Figueroa, José Cerda (a.k.a ESDLCP), and Mika Martini (a.k.a Frank Benkho) have all expressed their commitment to the principles of non-commercial music circulation. They have all incorporated DAW technology to sample and arrange preexisting sound materials (even if some of their practices explore other techniques as well). They each have pushed the boundaries of musical convention, often in ways that meld elements of both electronic popular music and electronic art music or electroacoustic music. And in addition, as will be explored in much greater detail in the following chapter, each of these artists remains open and attentive to the possibilities of creative collaboration.

Chapter VI

(Re)sounding Together: Collaboration, Collectivism, and Creative Conversation in the Commons

The means of communication are the builders of a society. In and of themselves, they are made to build, to interchange, to fraternize, to make us think, to educate.
- Pope Francis 2016¹

One of the most distinguishing features of the netlabel movement is its capacity to cultivate deeply collaborative and collective interactions among its participants, often in ways that transcend physical distance and provide opportunities for meaningful social discourse. In this chapter I address this topic by illustrating how, in the art world of the netlabel, the same circumstances that provide new opportunities for individual expression and experimentation (see chapter IV and V) also give rise to novel social relations and collaborative creative projects that would be difficult to conceive, let alone realize, in any other context. I examine how the non-commercial nature of netlabel distribution and the non-proprietary orientation of Creative Commons licenses, while reflecting clear ideological commitments (see chapter III), provide the practical benefit of enabling artists to more freely engage, alter, and contribute to the works of their peers. I argue that such collaborative interactions help to generate the feelings of inclusion, the recognition of shared interests and concerns, and the willingness to offer mutual aid and promotion that

¹ http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/12/07/504701652/pope-francis-warns-media-against-infatuation-with-scandal-citing-coprophilia?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=202807 (Accessed 12/8/16)

provide a basis for the creation and maintenance of cosmopolitan musical collectives that exist as much in the virtual/online realm as in face-to-face/offline social contexts. Lastly, I suggest that the nature of communication and exchange that undergirds these artistic networks helps to sustain – and is sustained by – an alternate public sphere. While circumnavigating the limitations placed on social discourse by dominant/commercial media interests, this alternate public sphere supports a liberty of expression that influences not only the structure of artistic expression, but also how artists conceive their role in society, how they communicate with others through their work, and how they imagine the social collectives in which they participate.

This chapter begins with a brief theoretical discussion, followed by an analysis of two manifestations of these themes in the creative output of the Chilean netlabel scene. In the first case, I examine how remix phenomena function distinctly in relation to the share-and-share-alike Creative Commons licensing procedures endemic within the netlabel context.² I explore how in this environment these practices have developed in relation to a spirit of cooperation and creative discourse, and less as a practice in creative subterfuge and/or subversion as has often been the case in the more competitive realm of commercial media markets. I outline this approach by offering an example of remix efforts related to a work introduced in chapter V, along with a more experimental example that re-envision the nature of remixes altogether by conceiving these not as auxiliary expressions separate from the initial work, but rather as an integral part of the overall project.

² For the purposes of this discussion, I define “remixing” as a practice that incorporates digital or analog sampling techniques to re-craft the works of others in order to make recombinatory and derivative works of one’s own.

In the second case, I deal with a phenomenon even more particular to the netlabel movement. This pertains to a series of compilation projects curated by netlabels, wherein multiple artists, often from distant geographic locales, contribute individual pieces to a mosaic production that addresses a theme of mutual interest and/or concern. In certain instances, the netlabel affiliates who envision these projects encourage participating artists to work exclusively with a shared body of audio source materials that these artists may then sample and manipulate according to their will. In others, participants are directed simply to offer contributions that reflect upon the theme with few additional parameters. Regardless of the specific characteristics, however, I suggest that these projects offer artists an opportunity to engage in meaningful social discourse. This occurs as they share unique perspectives concerning the themes and materials at hand, and as they juxtapose these personal views with those of others through a process of collective presentation that in many cases reflects the complexities and nuances of controversial social issues better than any individual contribution alone.

Collaboration

As a caveat, I must acknowledge that the collaborative artistry, community relations, and social discourses discussed in this chapter are interdependent and mutually engendered and they do not necessarily flow one from the other in linear fashion. Thus, while I consider these issues independently (and in this order) for argument's sake, it is important to recognize the dynamic processes that enable each type of interaction to

continually influence the others.³ With that said, however, I begin with collaboration, as this represents perhaps the most obvious indication of the types of social interaction facilitated by netlabels.

First, it is important to bear in mind that the Internet has enabled increasingly collaborative networks of interaction since its introduction. In the mid-1990s, while chronicling the order of social interaction in the first years of the public Internet, performance and Jewish studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett had already observed a predilection for collaboration and conviviality surfacing in relation to the steady expansion of this “decentralized” and “distributed medium” (1996). Among her examples, she highlighted a *Digital Quilt* project organized for Women’s History Month in 1993 that comprised squares contributed by women in multiple locations, “transmitted by fax, e-mail, or other electronic medium” (Ibid.:30). She also described a venture called *The USENET Cookbook*, noting how this differed from commercially printed cookbooks, by incorporating the recipes of its users and thus functioning, “more like the expanding and contracting collective wisdom of an offline network of cooks and their individual repertoires...” (Ibid.:31-32).

Significantly, the near immediate proliferation of such projects at the inception of the Internet thus indicates that the will to collaborate on initiatives and expressions of common interest likely predated the arrival of this medium.⁴ At the same time, this

³ Likewise, insofar as preexisting social inclinations inspired the formation of the media networks that support the netlabel movement, while being transformed in turn by the resulting patterns of diffusion and communication, the principle of interdependency applies to these dynamics as well.

⁴ In support of this notion the plunderphonic musical art Negativland have suggested: “In much earlier times (prior to the corporately driven modern era of hands-off, privately owned and copyrighted cultural material) the natural human approach to our own culture was to participate in it not only by absorbing it as an individual, but also by sharing and remaking it—adding to it, removing from it, recombining it with other elements, reshaping it to our own tastes—and then redistributing the adjusted results ourselves. Virtually the whole history of human culture, from singing around the fire to tool making and oil painting,

sudden propagation suggests that the nature of media communications in the previous era also suppressed this same inclination. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in the more than 25 years since its first appearance, the public Internet has further expanded and de-territorialized the possibilities for such interactions far beyond that which was even possible to imagine when it came into being. This tendency has surfaced, for instance, through the collective efforts of millions of individuals who contribute information, without compensation, to online archives like Wikipedia. It has likewise appeared in various social media forums, online gaming collectives, YouTube instructional videos, and virtual performance networks (Miller 2012), among countless other examples.

The various Chilean netlabels followed in this study, as well as those tied to the wider netlabel movement, also emerged as fundamentally collaborative efforts. From the start, the various individuals involved in these projects shared technologies and technological support. They contributed to the promotion and organization of these collectives, offering skills in website construction and maintenance, visual design, sound mixing, interpersonal relations, and other types of expertise (see chapter III). Above all, they also contributed their own works to expand the musical catalogs of these organizations. Still, the collaborative dimension of this movement, which often spans great geographic distances between countless participants, extends beyond simply helping to establish a viable network for the distribution and reception of personal productions. Even more intriguingly, it involves the music itself; and it is in this respect that this phenomenon exemplifies how a common human proclivity to seek cooperative

consisted of copying from and altering the universal public domain in various re-imagined ways...until copyright came along” (2005:4)

interactions through online social networks also influences how artistic projects are created and conceived.

At least three factors remain particularly influential in this regard. The first relates to the non-commercial means of diffusion central to the netlabel movement and common to Internet activity in general, and this may be seen most clearly in contrast to its alternative. While the more commercial circuits that characterize industry dominated musical culture tend to inhibit the collaboration – in large part by introducing the principles of market competition and a slew of logistical complications pertaining to contracts, copyright, and other proprietary legal entanglements – non-commercial networks often elicit the opposite effect. One reason for this distinction relates to music industry scholars Krister Malm and Roger Willis’s observation that “where economic risks are less, cultural and social rewards can be expected to have greater influence” (1993:28). This principle resonates with the comparatively decentralized, peer-to-peer methods of musical exchange that have developed along with the expansion of the Internet, since these networks encourage socialization as an alternative incentive to financial gain. Yet, these same circumstances also serve as a catalyst for collaboration, insofar as the latter represents an important means through which online socialization is generated and maintained.

A second closely related factor concerns the unique characteristics of digital content production and diffusion, and here it is helpful to recall recorded music historian Greg Milner’s assertion that “the promise of digital” manifests most notably through its capacity to “achieve maximum flexibility” (2009:297). As examined in chapter IV, the easily malleable nature of digital audio has revolutionized individual music production

techniques in recent years by enabling everyday artists to more easily record, manipulate, and exchange sounds in all their myriad manifestations. However, this same characteristic also lends itself to the types of recombinatory, aggregated, and cooperative practice that characterize Internet collaboration in general, and the various projects outlined below in particular. Milner observes, for instance, how the “universal code” of digital media allows information and expression to be produced, consumed, transformed, and exchanged by an ever-increasing multitude of people, who incorporate similar technological tools,⁵ and who share the products of their efforts through mutually accessible distribution networks (Ibid.:301). Hence, the universality and immediacy of digital media allows potential collaborators to work within a common technological paradigm, to communicate with a common technological lexicon, and to mitigate geographic distance as a limiting factor in these practices.

As a third factor, the alternative rights management opportunities presented by Creative Commons have further bolstered Internet collaboration in more recent years by codifying into a simplified and customizable legal framework many of the creative tendencies referenced above. Moreover, the proponents of this initiative have served as vocal champions of collaborative interaction and the free exchange of information and expression as they incorporate these licenses to “mark their creativity with the freedoms they intend it to carry,” and to declare, ““This is the picture of creativity I believe in”” (Lessig 2008:277-278).

⁵ In this sense, the MP3 and other audio file formats represent perhaps the most significant innovations for music production, since these allow musical content to be easily transferred through the Internet, easily consumed through nearly all modern audio playback devices, and easily transformed using DAW production technologies (see chapters III and IV).

Collectivism

Concerning the link between collaboration and socialization, it is interesting to note that many collaborative interactions realized through the Internet begin with strangers, who either know one another solely through the relatively indirect means of Internet profiles, or not at all. This scenario characterized several of the early examples cited by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, while years later it holds true for many of the relations described by my own interlocutors as they discussed their initial experiences with Internet collaboration.⁶ Nevertheless, my research among netlabel participants in Chile suggests that indirect interactions often evolve into more interpersonal and community-like relations as well, as the practice of cooperative creativity transforms relative strangers into online acquaintances, associates, and in certain instances close friends, who may also continue their collaborative endeavors in offline settings.

To address these dynamics, along with their specific relevance to the netlabel movement, it is necessary to first examine some of the tendencies that lead individuals to seek online social interaction in the first place. For this, anthropologist Daniel Miller and social economist Don Slater provide a useful point of departure with their ethnographic study of Internet mediated social practices initiated and/or engaged from homes, cybercafés, and businesses in Trinidad (2000). In this work, these authors relate how the “expansion of communication” facilitated by the Internet provides an opportunity for the “expansive realization” of personal and/or cultural identities that may otherwise be hindered for myriad reasons within more immediate offline circumstances. They suggest that Internet communications may thus be “used to repair a discrepancy, thereby helping communities and people come closer to a realization of who they already feel they really

⁶ This also represents the circumstance that Creative Commons was most directly designed to facilitate.

are” (Ibid.:178).⁷ In outlining this view, these scholars highlight the Internet mediated maintenance of extended familial relations and national identities shared among those living in the Trinidadian diaspora – relations previously challenged by distance and the difficulties of maintaining meaningful patterns of social communication. Yet, beyond the Trinidadian context, Miller and Slater’s theory remains broadly applicable to Internet activity in general, as one of the great advantages of this medium, particularly for those harboring less common identities and interests, relates to its capacity to vastly ‘expand’ the social field within which individuals may encounter and engage others who share similar affinities and affiliations.

In this respect, the musical and social practices associated with the netlabel movement are no exception. Much of the impetus that inspired early participants to become involved in this movement arose from previous frustrations in finding a like-minded cohort in more immediate surroundings (see chapter III). Likewise, only when extended to encompass the small pockets of isolated individuals living amid a much larger regional and/or trans-regional social field did the networks of affiliation common to this movement become recognizable as a viable translocal subculture. Still, this recognition of common social and aesthetic values has also roused many to transcend the initial anonymity of online interactions in order to seek more personal, meaningful, and lasting connections. And in these instances, where interpersonal connections are cultivated via online networks that allow acquaintanceships to be strengthened through

⁷ These authors also contrast “expansive realization” with another phenomenon that they define as “expansive potential,” wherein “the internet may allow one to envisage a quite novel vision of what one *could* be, a vision that is often projected as a feature of the Internet itself” (2000:11 my emphasis).

mutual social ties, this may engender something beyond the vague associations of musical subculture and more akin to musical community.⁸

Interestingly, when compared to the “imagined communities” formed in relation to the capitalist print and broadcast media circuits of the 19th and 20th-centuries (Anderson 1983, see also chapter I), many of these Internet-facilitated community formations exhibit significant distinctions. Miller and Slater’s ethnography suggests, for instance, that while individuals may use the Internet to connect with a previously-imagined community (i.e. bringing imagined national relations into direct contact), the decentralized and participatory nature of the medium has also granted considerable agency to individuals, who may now conceive and seek to foster community relations on their own terms and in keeping with more personalized ideals, identities, and interests.⁹ Moreover, this increased agency in community formation points to a shifting balance, away from the predominant, inherited markers (i.e. nationality, ethnicity, religion, etc.) that bind what ethnomusicologist Kay Shelemay (2011) defines as “communities of descent,” and towards the more voluntary associations that characterize those collectives she labels as “communities of dissent” and “communities of affiliation.”¹⁰

⁸ According to ethnomusicologist Kay Shelemay, “... a musical community is a social entity, an outcome of a combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves” (2011:364-365). In further marking the subtle distinction between musical subculture and this view of musical community, I take the former to simply reference a series of shared cultural practices and preferences that deviates in some way from those attributed to mainstream norm, while the latter emphasizes the *recognition* that these shared traits mark those who gravitate to them as part of a substratum of society and as part of their own distinguishable social grouping.

⁹ Miller and Slater thus state that, “... as with transient kinship, Internet relationships are more dyadic, voluntaristic and based on the continuity of their re-constitution through constant acts of exchange” (2000:81). Incidentally, this observation also highlights the importance of the collaborative and read/write interactions referenced above, as these modes of exchange enable individuals to influence and engage shared media content, and by extension to influence, however subtly, the ways in which the constituents of emergent communities “imagine” their commonalities.

¹⁰ According to Shelemay’s categorization, *communities of dissent* are conceived in opposition to existing collectives and may use music to attract others to their cause, while *communities of affinity* congeal as individuals recognize commonalities uniting their own personal interests and affinities to those of others.

In this respect, Mark Katz provides a pertinent example as he suggests that the peer-to-peer Internet exchange of MP3s has provided a means of social interaction that allows individuals to “rethink their ideas about musical authenticity, and [to] form *virtual communities* around shared musical interests” (2010:185 my emphasis). He goes on to acknowledge how:

...such communities may address needs that no off-line group could meet. Physical distance collapses, so that the geographically isolated can come together; distinctions of age, class, gender, and race may fade (though not completely), allowing a freedom of interaction unlikely in any other way. (Ibid:193)

The same also holds true for netlabel communities, as many early progenitors of the movement actively searched the vast expanses of the Internet for others who shared their eccentric tastes in music wherever they might reside. Once encountered, these individuals purposely fostered social ties with these individuals, often by inviting these musicians to collaborate or otherwise participate in projects associated with their own netlabel organizations, and by offering contributions to musical endeavors curated by others. Through time, many of these affiliations then became increasingly strong, as participating musicians shared not only music, but also “beliefs, ideals, and lifestyles” (Ibid.:194), and as they continued to extend their social networks by introducing friends to new musical acquaintances, and so on.

It is important to also recognize, however, that even as these community formations may originate and evolve primarily in the virtual sphere, this does not mean they are necessarily contained there. In fact, reflecting Kirsheblatt-Gimlett’s early observation that “online and in-the-flesh worlds can and do converge...”(1996:29), my research confirms that even the most geographically distant relationships facilitated by online musical exchange and collaboration have often motivated face-to-face encounters

as well. In certain cases, these meetings have taken place through the organization of musical performances, where one musician hosts another (or multiple others) from some distant locality as a means to introduce and promote his or her work beyond its existing sphere of influence (see for instance the forward to chapter I).¹¹ In other scenarios, musicians have traveled to realize collaborative endeavors better served by face-to-face interaction, or even just to meet an online acquaintance in person in order to experience something of their world. Yet, regardless of the specifics, this tendency reveals a common inclination to reconcile, or bring into greater harmony, deeply felt online and offline experiences and social interactions whenever possible.¹² Moreover, even when such face-to-face encounters continue to remain impossible for whatever reason, online interpersonal relations have nonetheless become among the most important social relations in some of my interlocutors lives, and as such, they do not seem to be conceived as separate or in any less ‘real’ than connections experienced elsewhere.¹³

¹¹ Speaking to this tendency, Pueblo Nuevo’s Mika Martini states: “The netlabels are a perfect platform form for generating a relation, or to invent festivals, and to have people to contact. With this philosophy of the free download or Free Culture, when someone approaches a person from another country, or an acquaintance that is in the same part of the world... when I go over there, they invite me to play, I’m not interested in having them pay me... No the idea is that I go there to play. This form of relation is very nice. I’ve had the good fortune to play in various places; there was a concert with various friends in Barcelona (friends) from Pueblo Nuevo. So at some point I’ll return to Barcelona to be with them. I organized a tour of Europe from Spain to Germany, where there was a festival of netlabels, in the city of Cologne. I played in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Mexico, there was a tour of Mexico organized by people that had netlabels in distinct cities in Mexico. All these types of things were very, very interesting in relation this movement of netlabels in South America, and worldwide” (Personal interview, Santiago 10/22/2012).

¹² Admittedly, to the extent that this extends beyond one’s immediate geographic domain, this sort of online/offline reconciliation remains a privilege reserved for those with access to the economic means necessary for long distance travel.

¹³ In an extended interview with the co-directors/participants of a relatively tiny netlabel called Sheep – which included the works of only four amateur musicians, included Gerardo Figueroa, whose work I profiled in the previous chapter – these interlocutors and friends outlined a particularly striking example of the hybrid social relations that shaped their own small musical collective (Personal interview, Santiago, 2/5/2013). One of these participants in particular, Marisol (a.k.a Maripuchan Soundmachine), explained how several years back a fellow musician in Beijing, China contacted her after encountering and appreciating some of the original musical works she presented on her MySpace page. This initiated an ongoing social dialogue that eventually resulted in the two musicians collaborating on various musical productions, which they passed back and forth from opposite sides of the globe before completion.

Social Discourse

As another factor in this equation, the nature of community formation and that of social discourse also provide conditions that help to constitute and sustain one another, in the netlabel context and in relation to other Internet phenomena. In the introduction to this dissertation, I addressed this correlation, in part, by referencing Jürgen Habermas's definition of the "public sphere," as that the social space where public discourse may enable the formation of public consensus, and by extension the sense of commonality (1974). I also noted, however, that in relation to an increasingly fragmented media landscape, this unified marketplace of ideas is being replaced by a contested terrain, characterized by multiple and distinguishable public spheres and corresponding public bodies (Meyer and Moore 2006:12). Expanding on this view here, I posit that in the midst of a "new media era" (Larkin 2008) the netlabel movement and the broader Creative Commons network have helped to generate what might be considered an alternative public sphere, by providing a platform for circulating, through artistic expression, an array of social perspectives and aesthetic values marginalized by mainstream media conduits. At the same time, I suggest the social discourse fostered in this way helps to generate the sense of commonality and collectivism referenced above.

To situate the importance of such endeavors in the Chilean context, it is helpful to first revisit Rosalind Bresnahan's assessment of the media landscape that proliferated

Eventually, Marisol and the other members of the Sheep netlabel invited the Chinese musician Sun to become part of their small collective, where he released several of his productions and participated in various collaborative projects. As a further indication of the depth of this relationship, however, several years later at a small performance gathering that highlighted performances from the various members of the Sheep label on the occasion of their organization's seventh anniversary, I also witnessed Marisol give an impassioned speech that reflected on her deeply meaningful, long distance collaborative relationship with Sun, while also addressing the difficulties imposed upon it by an increasingly repressive Chinese internet policy. Moreover, later that same year, she actually travelled to Beijing solely to meet with Sun, and to collaborate, record, and perform there together with him.

during the nation's "neoliberal transition" in the 1990s, in an era immediately preceding the mass arrival of the Internet to the region (see also chapter II). Citing the findings of the Freedom of Expression Project of the University of Chile's School of Journalism, Bresnahan explains how at this time a declining state of media diversity "had resulted in an impoverished public sphere with an 'overwhelming predominance' of neoliberal, socially conservative media that 'in no way represented the full range of the ideas and tendencies of the population as a whole'"(2003:46, citing Otano and Sunkel 1999:1). Insightfully, however, Bresnahan also outlined a strategy of opposition in relation to this status quo, by referencing a statement of principles provided by the National Network of Grassroots Video and Community TV. This affirmed:

...the need of broad social sectors, especially at the grassroots, to express themselves on their own, to seek and develop their own forms of communication, autonomous, independent, without intermediaries...[in order to] stimulate hopes; share the struggles and desires for justice, a clean environment, and the overcoming of discrimination and oppression; and promote dreams and aspirations. (Red Nacional de Video Popular y TV Comunitaria 1995, cited in Bresnahan 2003:59)

In seeking to engender a viable alternative, in both thought and action, to the dominant principles of neoliberalism and conservatism that continue to dominate public life in Chilean society, the netlabel initiative may thus be considered part of an emergent grassroots media network.¹⁴ In this way, moreover, the movement shares certain commonalities with sympathetic endeavors that point to the fracturing and decentralization of Habermas's notion of the public sphere elsewhere. To cite two such examples, media anthropologist Mark Whitaker, for one, has argued that in contrast to more commercially oriented media circuits the Internet has thus far remained open to the

¹⁴ For instance, Michita Rex co-founder Danae Morales has acknowledged that, as a both a brand and as collective, her netlabel, "is still something for a very specialized public," and one that stands at odds with the dominant aesthetic and social trends in Chilean society (Personal interview, Santiago, 4/18/13).

mass dissemination of “identity-resistance popular activity” (Whitaker 2004: 474). As such, he has observed in the politically motivated Sri Lankan news organization Tamilnet.com the emergence of what he describes as an entirely “alternative public sphere” that has managed to subvert the censorship of the Sinhalese majority government (2004). Similarly, anthropologist Charles Hirschkind has analyzed how the circulation of cassette sermons in Egypt, even while being supported by a more anachronistic media technology, has also contributed to a series of “counterpublic” discourses and practices that stand in a “disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments” (Hirschkind 2006:117).

While the netlabel movement in Chile may not rise to the level of constituting an entirely “alternative public sphere” in-and-of itself, these organizations do contribute to a network of small media endeavors in Chile – including DIY magazines, informational websites, and online social networks – that together sustain what might reasonably be considered a sphere of oppositional or “counterpublic” discourse.¹⁵ Moreover, even beyond their significance in circulating these discourses, the non-commercial, share-and-share-alike ethos of the netlabel phenomenon influences the very nature of social interaction among participants who engage and participate in these networks. It encourages collaborative rather competitive interrelations, communal rather than proprietary approaches to creativity, and a more participatory rather than passive engagement with media content. And in this sense, the movement intersects with and contributes to an expanding “alternate” public sphere that exists at the transnational level

¹⁵ Generally speaking, the themes that emerge from this public discourse reveal a willingness to grapple with the contentious “memory knots” relating to Chile’s political history and its contemporary legacy (Stern 2010), as well issues ranging from indigenous rights, environmental issues, education and labor policies, and a host of additional concerns generally minimized in more mainstream public discourses.

as well, especially as this manifests through the broad social movements tied to the expansion of Creative Commons and Free Culture ideology (see also chapter III).

In the final section of this chapter, I return to the topic of social discourse as I consider how the thematic compilation projects cultivated by many netlabel collectives provide unique opportunities for multiple musicians to share and compare their opinions on issues of common interest and concern in a public venue. However, as I consider the distinctly musical trends that have arisen in relation to the dynamic circumstances outlined thus far, I turn first to the analysis of the distinctly collaborative and social nature of remixing in the netlabel context, as this provides a particularly revealing and widespread example.

Remixing as Creative Conversation

In one of the early interviews for this investigation, electronica artist and multi-netlabel participant Francisco Pinto offering an especially telling indication of the social dimension of remixing in the netlabel context when he explained, “Yeah, it's a good way to get to know new people” (Personal interview, Santiago 1/17/2016).¹⁶ Elaborating, Pinto acknowledged how the process of crafting remixes enables him to engage the music he appreciates on a deeper level, while at the same time cultivating meaningful personal connections with the initial creators of these productions. For him, these connections have included musicians located in Santiago and elsewhere in Chile, as well as others from as far away as France and other parts of Europe. Like many of the musicians I interviewed, he explained how such interactions, many of which initially revolved around

¹⁶ Pinto happens to hold the distinction of having his work freely accessed more than any other artist in the Chilean netlabel scene, with over 200,000 (!) individual downloads registered for his 2009 Pueblo Nuevo release *Boo Boo*.

netlabel activity, have evolved into some of his most important and long-lasting friendships. He further detailed this process, stating: “For me, if there is a musician or band or whatever that interests me, and I don't know them [personally], I try to make a remix. I write them and say, ‘I'd like to remix you’ And it works! With some people it doesn't, but others, yes. And if they say no, [shrugs] ‘OK’” (Ibid.).

As confirmed by this account and by a general overview of the netlabel movement writ large (Galuska 2012), remixing has been a defining and binding characteristic of this phenomenon since its inception. This correlation relates, on the one hand, to the commitment shared by most netlabels to release works along with Creative Commons licensing guidelines that enable and encourage other artists to engage these productions as potential source material for derivative works. On the other hand, netlabels promote remixing by offering considerable presentational space to such recombinatory works as well, often alongside the original source productions hosted in their catalog. In fact, the Chilean netlabels Pueblo Nuevo and Jacobino Discos in particular have made it a common practice to release entire remix compilations that juxtapose works produced by multiple artists, who all focus on reimagining and recontextualizing various tracks from a previous netlabel release.¹⁷

Through a process I label ‘creative conversation,’ this type of community oriented remix practice serves a variety of functions related to trends referenced throughout this dissertation. These include: highlighting the influence of the source production and amplifying its initial impact; showcasing the creativity and technical mastery of the remix artists; nurturing and reinforcing social bonds within a netlabel collective; and fostering networks between various netlabel collectives both near and far. In addition to this,

¹⁷ Many other local and foreign netlabels also do the same.

however, the folk-like, conversational, and community-forming qualities of remixing in the art world of the non-commercial Commons further distinguish this practice from similar practices in the fields of commercial pop and electronica. Indeed, while remixing as it pertains to the latter tends to orient itself either to creating a marketable musical commodity and/or to marketing a musical commodity that already exists,¹⁸ the value of the remix for the former concerns the social and creative *process* as much if not more than the *product* it creates. In these instances, as Lawrence Lessig explains:

Remixes happen within a community of remixers. In the digital age, that community can be spread around the world. Members of that community create in part for one another. They are showing one another how they can create, as kids on a skateboard are showing their friends how they can create. That showing is valuable, even when the stuff produced is not.” (2008:77)

As far as the technical details involved in this practice are concerned, Pinto relates that when compelled to reconstruct the work of another,¹⁹ an artist typically begins by requesting from the original producer both permission, and more importantly, access to all of the individual tracks, sound files, and samples clips for the work in question (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/17/13).²⁰ Once received, these digital audio components and organizational schematics are uploaded into a DAW program (or far less often, plugged into an analog sampler), wherein the remix artist may begin to manipulate, rearrange, and/or disassemble these source materials in accordance with his or her own creative will and technical ability (see chapter IV). From this point, in Pinto’s words, each artist then approaches the practice of remixing according to his or her “own code”

¹⁸ In those cases where these ends remain unlikely, and where the copyright holder perceives no other advantages, the necessary permissions are also unlikely to be granted.

¹⁹ In addition to Pinto’s account, the details of the process were confirmed by several other participants in this study, as well as by my own personal experience producing a few remixes for netlabel release.

²⁰ Given the digital format of these files, if a remix request is granted, these may be easily transferred via the Internet from just about anywhere, making remixes for works of distant artists no less technically challenging than those created closer to home.

(Ibid.). For some, this means working strictly with the original source files through processes of alteration and reassembly. For others, the addition of new samples and/or sonorities is also fair game. For still others, the resulting “remix” may obscure any obvious relation to the original piece altogether, as the artist chooses instead to demonstrate his or her capacity to drive the source materials in completely unexpected directions. The take away, however, is that while remaining bound by a few common technical parameters and social etiquettes, this type of remixing remains open to a near infinite variety of stylistic approaches – and it is this quality that makes it such an intriguing means of creative and collaborative dialogue between producers and friends.

As an example, Pinto’s own approach to remixing demonstrates a penchant for drawing out minor motivic patterns and/or harmonic shifts in an original work for further development and emphasis. In addition, he tends to recontextualize essential components (like vocal tracks) with new rhythms, counter melodies, and harmonic components, all while attempting not to destroy “the essence of the original” (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/17/2016). These characteristics and their creative effects may be seen in a widely circulated remix that Pinto crafted for the track “Aeropuerto” by the artist Pamela Sepulveda, a.k.a. Fakuta.²¹

In this case, the source material derives from the final track of Fakuta’s debut album *Al Vuelo* [Take to Flight], which she released through Michita Rex in 2011. As an introspective collection of electro-pop songs sung with a soft-spoken yet endearing inflection reminiscent of one of Fakuta’s idols, Madonna, *Al Vuelo* is spun with wistful lyrics that depict melancholic longing for something more from personal relationships and from life in general. This sentiment is especially apparent on “Aeropuerto,” where

²¹ See chapter III for more details of Fakuta’s work and influence in the Chilean netlabel scene.

the airport stands as a metaphor for the point of departure through which stagnation gives way to transcendence. Yet, as Fakuta sings, “To the airport we go, you know we can change the climate, and it’s not even that hard when we are determined to be unrestrained...,” the musical setting she constructs belies her lyrics’ resolve. The entire first verse and chorus is accompanied only by an unembellished keyboard chord progression (G#-D#6 x2/ Fm-D#6 x2) and this minimalist musical backdrop seemingly reframes Fakuta’s words in an imaginative, indeterminate context. Indeed, even as the song picks up momentum midway through, with the introduction of a stabbing, synthesized bass line, a basic drum machine rhythm, and various keyboard embellishments, one is still left with the impression that perhaps the entire episode has emerged as a daydream scenario and that the antagonist might not actually be going anywhere.²²

In contrast to the subdued tone of the original, however, Pinto’s remix recasts this work in a new light. In reimagining the track, he maintains essential components like its harmonic structure, the quality of Fakuta’s voice and the clear presentation of the lyrics, the overall form, and even many of the electronic timbres of her backing tracks. Yet, he introduces a driving and danceable 4/4 rhythm at the onset, along with an arpeggiated synthesizer bass line that fleshes out the song’s chord structure, and counter melodic synth pads and other minor rhythmic embellishments that increase the track’s density and grant it a sense of grit and determination. Consequently, while the lyrics remain

²² *Al Vuelo* may be downloaded from: <http://michitarex.tumblr.com/post/93611891862/mrex15-fakuta-al-vuelo-2011-free>

unchanged, the escapades they narrate take on a distinct interpretation – perhaps moving beyond the realm of abstract speculation and towards that of actuality.²³

It must be said that in terms of production aesthetic value and basic affect, neither of the two versions of “Aeropuerto” surpasses the other. Rather, each presents a unique take on the same basic poetry, and each may be appreciated as such. Nonetheless, the sense of familiarity that connects the two, both on the part of the artists and their largely mutual audiences, allows these iterations to “converse” with one another, as each takes on additional nuances through juxtaposition and comparison with the other. In a related turn of events, moreover, Pinto indicated that even as the “aeropuerto” remix began through a “cold” contact to Fakuta, who he had not known personally at that point, the success of the remix has helped to cultivate a friendship and a mutually supportive collaborative relationship between the two in ensuing years (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/17/2016).²⁴



Fig. 6.1: Cover art for Fakuta’s album *Al Vuelo* [Take to Flight] and its remix album *Al Suelo* [To the Floor]. The latter, which includes Francisco Pinto’s version of “Aeropuerto,” was released though Fakuta’s own website in 2013.

²³ Fransico Pinto’s remix of “Aeropuerto” may be streamed or downloaded at: <http://www.fakuta.cl/al-suelo/>

²⁴ In December 2013, for instance, I witnessed the two artists co-headlining a performance at a Santiago venue, where they performed a combination of the two versions of the “Aeropuerto” track live. On Pinto’s most recent album *Retarded* (released through Pueblo Nuevo in 2016), Fakuta lent her vocals to two of his productions as well.

For a second example of the types of creative and social practices that accompany netlabel/Creative Commons remixing, I return to the music of El Sueño de la Casa Propia (ESDLCP), first examined in the previous chapter. As previously noted, ESDLCP's released his debut *Historial de Caídas* through Pueblo Nuevo in 2010.²⁵ Yet, due the considerable interest generated by this pioneering work, the following year Pueblo Nuevo released a 12-track album of remixes of this material as well, produced by artists from Mexico, Venezuela, and various parts of Chile.

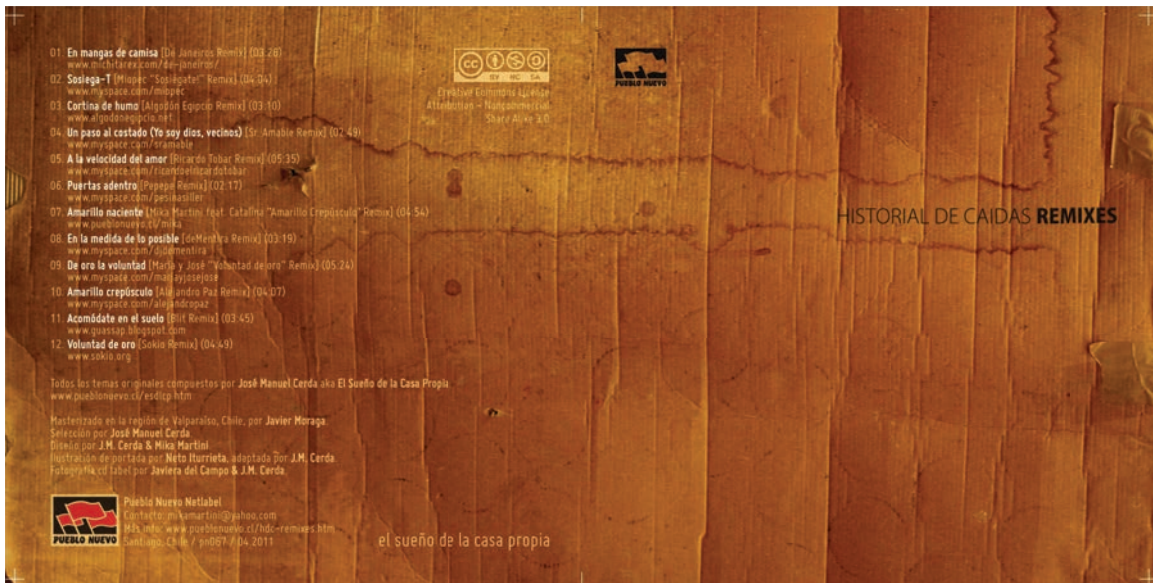


Fig. 6.2: Cover art for *Historial de Caídas Remixes*

Beyond the geographic dispersion of its participants (many of whom have cultivated a creative home base with other netlabels), the significance of this production is apparent, first of all, in the striking stylistic diversity that marks its varying contributions. In fact, confirming arguments raised in chapter IV concerning the

²⁵ This album may be streamed or downloaded at: <https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/hdc-remixes/>

increased intermingling between the fields of beat-driven electronica and more abstract electroacoustic art music, the expressions included in the *Historial de Caídas Remixes* album run the gamut of the electronic music spectrum. Contributors like Sokio (Chile/New York) and Pepepe (Mexico) up the ante on ESDLCP's rhythmic electronica grooves, creating thrusting tracks entirely suitable for the dance floor, while Mika Martini takes a contrasting, minimalist approach. He selects a single measure rhythmic/melodic figure from the introduction of the ESDLCP track "Amarillo crepúsculo [Yellow Twilight]" and gradually develops this over five minutes through minor variations and sonic adornments. Additional tracks engage ESDLCP's material from more cerebral, noisy, and avant-garde directions as well, allowing the album, in the words of its liner notes, to approach "the most diverse electronic music branches in a playful way."²⁶ As a result, this remix compilation, much like the larger art world context in which it was curated, enabled artists of different creative persuasions to not only share the same creative and social space, and to juxtapose their stylistic differences accordingly, but also to 'converse' creatively *across* genres through the remix process, while cultivating new social ties in the process.

In addition to this, however, a comparison of the approaches to sampling employed by ESDCLP in his *Historial de Caídas* album and those employed by nearly all of the artists who contributed to the remix album demonstrates how the unrestricted nature of cultural exchange in the Commons enables such conversational, cross-genre expressions to proceed in the first place. As outlined in the previous chapter, ESDLCP, who characterizes his entire musical practice as a "species of remix," often draws from copyright protected source material in composing his own unique expressions. In large

²⁶ <https://pueblonuevo.cl/catalogo/hdc-remixes/>

part due to legally inspired self-censorship, he also tends to completely obscure the origins of his sources through the processes of microsampling and extensive manipulation. Conversely, however, the remixers of *his* compositional arrangements employ a more direct approach to sampling. Encouraged by the share-and-share-alike Creative Commons license that accompanies ESDLCP's material, they include clearly recognizable melodic, rhythmic, and motivic fragments in their derivative works. They also reference the timbres, and in some cases even the larger formulaic structures of ESDLCP's productions. Hence, assuming the audience's familiarity with ESDLCP's original work, the remix tracks represent, in the words of Lessig, "an invitation to understand the links that were drawn—their meaning, the reason they were included" (2008:93). They also present a reflection of the remix artist's creative prowess in appreciating and reconfiguring the source material.²⁷ Even further still, in the common scenario where more than one artist remixes the same initial track, this presents an opportunity for artists and audience alike to consider and appreciate the often drastically distinct approaches taken by various interpreters as they engage the same source material from their own individual creative perspectives.

²⁷ For a specific example of this occurrence one may look to the two remixes created for the ESDLCP track "Voluntad de Oro." In the previous chapter, I explained how ESDLCP sourced his samples for this track in large part from the Joni Mitchell song "Blue," despite applying extensive digital processing to obliterate any clearly recognizable link to the former composition. Taking the opposite approach, however, the two artists, Maria y Jose (Mexico) and Sokio, who remix this track, overtly reference key melodic and rhythmic motifs from the initial mix. In particular, both versions highlight what I have noted as sample #5 (Fig. 5.11), which serves a chorus like function in ESDLCP's original track. Still, the two remixes also part ways as they draw attention to varying aspects of the source material in other ways. Maria y Jose, for instance, rely heavily on the rhythmic motif from what I label as ESDLCP's sample #1, along with a transposed iteration of his sample #4, while Sokio uses the pendular harmonic pattern of the ESDLCP's sample #2 as a foundation element of his interpretation. In addition, it is interesting to note the degree to which their overall outcomes of these two remixes also diverge completely. Maria y Jose's version, "De oro la voluntad," turns the original on its head, as its reconfigured title suggests, reorganizing the varying components into a surprisingly varied, through-composed work that transforms itself throughout. The Sokio take, by contrast, stays much truer to the initial composition, as it focuses instead on further exploiting the visceral, dance-oriented quality already present to some degree in the original.

A final example highlights this last point in further detail, while illustrating the extent to which social remixing may contribute to innovative and collaborative projects that challenge common understandings of how a remix may function in relation to its source material. For this, I turn to a project initiated by musician, artist, and author Álvaro Castro Delgado, a.k.a. Élançon, who I first encountered in performance at the annual all night electronic music festival *Noche Blanca* in January 2013. At this event, hosted in the grand hall of Santiago's *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo*,²⁸ Élançon entranced a somnolent audience in the predawn hours with a rendition of his eclectic composition *de agua y su evaporación* (Of Water and Its Evaporation). Featuring strange electronic sounds and sampled natural soundscapes ornamented with intermittent bursts from the Mapuche *trutruka* trumpet that lay curled around the artist's neck and torso, this exhibition left a haunting impression on me. It also compelled me to reach out to him so that I might further understand his work.

A few weeks later, responding to my interest, Castro welcomed me to his home, where he revealed the expansive and evolving nature of the musical vision he showcased in part at *Noche Blanca*. He explained that the presentation I had witnessed represented only a fraction of a much larger artistic project that encompassed mythology, poetry, music, narration, and the considerable contributions of countless collaborators (Personal interview, Santiago, 3/27/13). He noted how he envisioned this project as a “four chapter” endeavor, organized to reflect his interpretations of the four elements (water, air, fire, earth). He also related his intentions to realize these chapters through four album length musical productions, to be accompanied by four short novels. As he conveyed it:

²⁸ This was the same hall used for the *Exploradores del Sonido* event referenced in the introduction to this dissertation.

My project is a very structured one, because it has chapters and stories and transitions and I had everything written about how it will be... The kind of album, the kind of colors I want to accompany the sounds. Every album from here to the future is fixed, is anchored, to an image like a landscape, to a kind of color, or a palate of colors, an emotion and a style of aesthetic. And I have those three or four parameters, and I play with that. And as a four-chapter project, I plan transitions between them. (Ibid.)

At the time of our meeting, the first of these chapter/albums, entitled *Articulata*, had already been released through Jacobino Discos in 2011. Functioning as a collection of surreal and often eerie audio portraits, Castro crafted this album through the careful layering of synthesized and vocalized melodic fragments, spoken poetry, echoing howls, and author-recorded samples of flowing water, wind, and other natural sounds. Further situating this work in relation to his larger creative vision, Castro also noted:

Every LP [will explore] a basic element by the occidental culture. *Articulata* matches with the water album, the next one is the air album, the next is fire, and then ground. And between water and air I want a transition on how this water gets to the air. And how I represent air, and then flame... (Ibid.)



Fig. 6.3: Cover art for Elánsson's *Articulata* (Jacobino Discos 2011)

In addition to the ambitious and sprawling nature of Castro's work, two aspects are particularly notable in relation to themes of this chapter. First, reflecting the possibilities of virtual collaboration and translocal social interaction in the digital age,

Castro encountered one of the central collaborators for this project – Hope Epoh, an artist from Athens, Greece – via Myspace in the mid 2000s. While these two have still never met in person, Castro detailed a close working relationship and friendship that has evolved through their transcontinental exchange over several years.²⁹ Indeed, even as Castro mentioned fostering similar relationships with other musical collaborators from similarly distant locations (like Finland, for instance), he reflected upon on his interactions with Epoh in particular, stating:

I think that's the better part of globalization. He liked my music, and he told me about it and we started to talk. And at the very start we talked about the cover art... Then I encouraged him to collaborate with his voice, with some sounds, improvisations... We [continue to] chat from time to time... I think that's very important, we were very lucky to be sure about what the other was giving, and the compromise about giving some creativity and getting some creativity back. (Personal interview, Santiago, 3/27/13)

In addition to the collaborative quality inherent to the initial production, however, a second, even more unusual aspect of Castro's creative project as Élansson pertains to the collaborative efforts that have followed in the wake of its release. Outlining the origins of this happenstance, Castro noted that since the first album in this magnum opus took him 4-5 years to complete, and since he calculates spending a similar span of time on subsequent installments, he decided to initiate a series of EP remix releases to fill the interim periods. These he imagined as transitional works that might help to connect one chapter to the next, while also allowing friends and other acquaintances to engage and respond to his work. As he explained:

Yeah for the remixes I give all the control to the artists. The more authentic it is the more I like it... I have these concepts separated, and I saw them and I thought there was something missing. And this first album, besides its very personal, its very intimate, its too much of myself, and I thought in a moment that that was

²⁹ Epoh provided key vocal tracks for the *Articulata* album, as well as the remarkable artwork that graces its cover.

very selfish for me, to the people. I want to get closer [to others], so I thought that the better way to get all this stuff to the next level was to share it with everyone, and let everyone to answer and handle this as they can...And after I thought 'wow,' this is great because I'm supporting friends that many of them never did a remix about anything, never did anything with computers. So it was very interesting because the first remixes, especially for the first EP were for me very cool. They were all about just one song of the album, and I have this rainbow of stuff...(Personal interview, Santiago, 3/27/13)

To date Éllanson has released five remix EPs (of a projected seven!) that all use his initial *Articulata* LP as source material. These EPs have generated an incredible diversity of contributions from dozens of musicians, including one that I produced for his fourth installment. Further demonstrating the expansive social reach of this project, and the Internet networked dimension of the netlabel movement, these EPs have been released on two separate netlabels (Jacobino Discos and Pueblo Nuevo) thus far, with Castro hoping to extend the social network involved in this project by releasing future EPs and LPs through other netlabels as well.

In further assessing the nature of this project, one might question its expansive creative scope and whether the absence of certain art world boundaries (like deadlines, recording budgets, etc.) may, in some circumstances, allow excessively creative minds to envision projects that are so limitlessly conceived that they may be unlikely to ever be fully realized. At the same time, however, Castro's entire creative project as Éllansson is noteworthy precisely because it has been focused as least as much on cultivating the social relations, networks, and practices involved in its evolution as it has been on the achievement of any artistic end result. In fact, from an insider perspective, having participated in remixing Éllansson's work and having my contribution released in tandem with those reimagined variations contributed by others, I can attest that the back-and-forth process of creative feedback and exchange associated with this experience certainly

helped to strengthen my friendship with Castro. Likewise, this experience helped to instill a sense of creative communion with the larger community of remix contributors to this project. It is also worth mentioning that when I expressed interest in project, Castro immediately and enthusiastically welcomed my participation without any familiarity with my previous work as a musician. This suggests that for him the social connections and curiosities involved in these collaborations likely present a stronger incentive than any particular aesthetic contributions that individual collaborators might bring to the table.

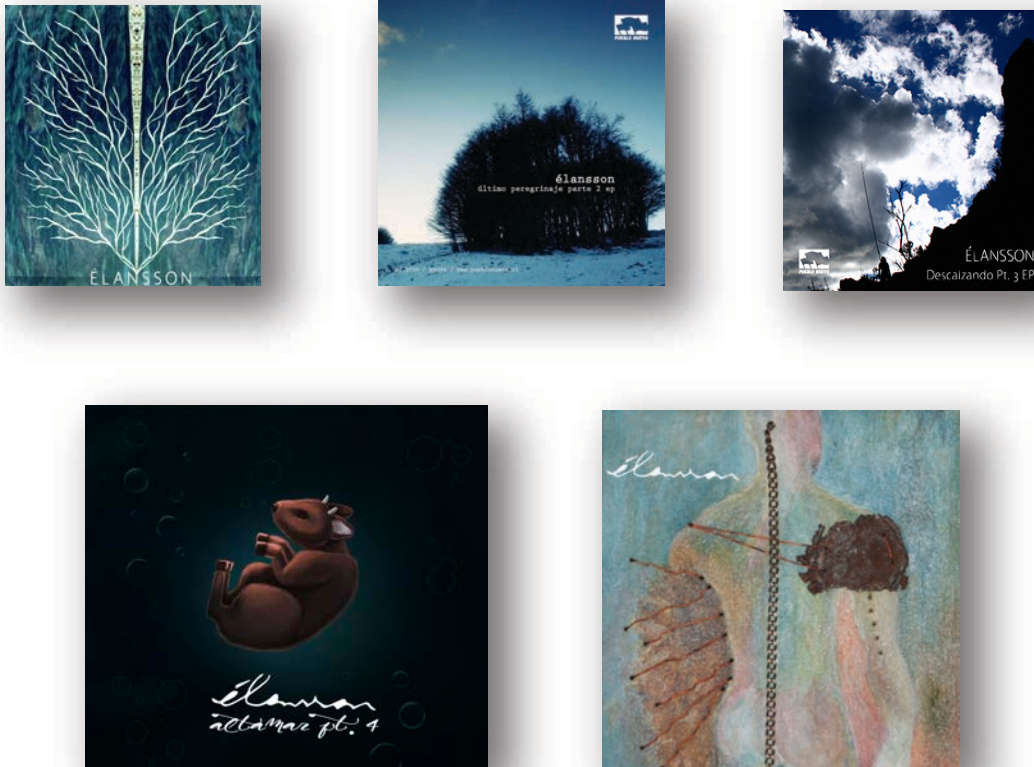


Fig. 6.4: Cover art for remix EPs for Élansson's *Articulata*, clockwise from top: *La marcha de un arolo Pt. 1* (Jacobino Discos 2011); *Último peregrinaje Pt.2* (Pueblo Nuevo 2011); *Descalzando Pt.3* (Pueblo Nuevo 2013), *Altamar Pt. 4* (Jacobino Discos 2014), *Nafragio y Ofanato Pt. 5* (Jacobino Discos 2015)

Netlabel Compilation Projects as Collaborative Social Discourse

Much like the collaborative remix albums referenced above, compilation projects have also become a significant feature of the netlabel phenomenon as a whole. Many netlabels use these releases to highlight the stylistic diversity of their collective's roster, to introduce new artists to the fold, and to foster social connections with other netlabels. In some cases, these compilation albums share no common thread beyond the communal relationships that determine inclusion in the project (see Fig. 6.5). In others, broad factors like regional, gender, or genre associations delineate the boundaries of participation (see Fig. 6.6). In still others, however, such projects are bound by a more specific theme. These productions are particularly remarkable insofar as they offer participants the opportunity to engage in a form of creative social discourse that arises as the varying perspectives reflected in individual contributions are juxtaposed with one another and presented as part of the same creative transcript.



Fig. 6.5: Cover art for Jacobino Disco's compilation album *50* and Michita Rex's *Música para el fin del mundo – Volumen 2*. As examples of standard netlabel compilation albums, *50* celebrated the Jacobino's 50th release with 50 new tracks from as many artists, while *Música para el fin del mundo – Volumen 2* (2011) highlighted notable tracks from the Michita Rex releases that year.



Fig. 6.6: Cover art for compilation albums that features members of a particular identity cohort. *V.A. Girls Alive* (Modismo 2015) highlights female artists, while the joint netlabel production *Junta de Vecinos* (Pueblo Nuevo/Epa Sonidos) includes artists from the Valparaíso region working solely with samples recorded in and around the port city.

In this way, thematic compilation projects facilitate what political scientist Mark Mattern identifies as the socially deliberative role of “acting in concert” through music. That is, “when members of a community use musical practice to debate their identity and commitments or when members of different communities negotiate mutual relations” (1998:28). The social “debate” that takes place in relation to these collective netlabel productions is often subtle and constructive, rather than confrontational. Yet, the process

of pulling together individual social and aesthetic expressions pertinent to a theme of common interest and/or concern nevertheless results in a diversity of perspective and/or opinion, and one that may enlighten the subject matter for artists and audiences alike. This process is all the more significant when the themes engaged are controversial and/or censored within the social discourse of the broader public sphere. However, regardless of their subject matter, such acts of mutual expression and social exchange also play an important role in inspiring and maintaining the sense of collectivism that binds the artistic communities involved in their creation. As Mika Martini relates:

...the compilation discs, where multiple people participate, its a moment in which we meet each other as musicians, we participate as a collective. These discs serve greatly to strengthen the relationship and the friendship between us, and between everyone that participates. Because you are part of the disc, it's not your individual disc... it always has more resonance. (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/22/13)

Commentating on the role of the netlabel medium and its non-commercial ethos in fostering these interactions, Martini also states:

...it would be impossible [to do this in another context]... many artists have commitments with their labels and things like this; they want to collect, and this puts you in a legal situation. In this sense netlabels open many possibilities to make music that is new, fresh, with any kind of idea. (Ibid.)

In Chile, various netlabels have released compilations in keeping with the aforementioned ideals. These have included productions dedicated to: the unique soundscapes and cultural traditions of regions like Valparaiso and Patagonia (Pueblo Nuevo #41 and 44); the obscured history of Chile's vernacular Christmas carol traditions (Michita Rex # 7, 17, 24, and 31); the vibrant culture surrounding the Santiago farmer/trade markets known as *Ferías Libres* (Jacobino Discos #20); and the painful memories surrounding an abandoned dictatorship detention and torture facility (Pueblo

Nuevo/Impar #6, see Fig. 3.9), to name a few. Similarly deliberative, non-commercial compilation productions have been curated by netlabels outside of Chile as well.³⁰ Yet, among the all the manifestations of this phenomenon, two in particular – Jacobino Disco's *Aukin Mapuche* (Mapuche Scream, 2011) and Pueblo Nuevo's *Synco Soundtrack* (2009) – deserve special attention.

Aukin Mapuche

The first of these, *Aukin Mapuche*, engages the musical traditions of Chile's largest indigenous community, while at the same time initiating a socio-political dialogue concerning the often-controversial legacy of this faction and its relationship to the Chilean state. Factoring into its conversational dynamic, the project is also intriguing insofar as its curators encouraged participants to engage a common library of audio samples, and to craft their expressions using this source material alone.

The project originated with a sound engineering thesis project, submitted to the Universidad Tecnológica de Chile by Juan Francisco Monsalve and Joaquín Salas in 2009. As part of this undertaking, these scholars compiled a vast collection of audio samples and loops produced by Mapuche instruments like the *Pifilka*, the *Trutruka*, the *Kultún*, and the *Trompe*, among several others, all recorded by a single Mapuche musician in a studio context. Conceived with the objective of documenting the musical diversity of the Mapuche community and highlighting the specific production techniques used to record these audio samples (Monsalve and Salas 2009), in the end the project openly distributed the resulting audio files with an attribution/non-commercial/share-and-

³⁰ For instance, the Polish netlabel Kif Recordings released an album in 2008 entitled *Anti-Nuclear Music Compilation: 22nd Anniversary of the Chernobyl Disaster*, which included 45 submissions from artists representing 19 nationalities, all reflecting on the historical legacy of this tragic event.

share-alike Creative Commons license. This, in turn, opened the door for the use of this material for derivative, sample-based musical works (as long as subsequent producers respected the legal guidelines outlined in the CC license).³¹



Fig. 6.7: Cover art for the Jacobino Discos production *Aukin Mapuche: Compilado de nuevo usos de Instrumentos Mapuches* (Compiled from new uses of Mapuche instruments).

Commenting on how the *Aukin Mapuche* compilation project advanced as a response to this opportunity, Jacobino Discos director Pablo Flores explained:

I heard before that some guys were making a library of Mapuche sounds, so I contacted them... They made this thing for their thesis in sound engineering and they couldn't do anything with it. I told them we [could use these sounds] to make

³¹ It is important to note that Monsalve and Salas's thesis highlights the possibility of such productions, and in fact, these authors justify the importance of their work partly along these lines (the educational value is also recognized). Within the work they cite Pueblo Nuevo's Mika Martini stating that: "...he considers the resulting material to be of much utility for Chilean musical projects in the field electronic, electroacoustic, and experimental music" (2009:41). These authors also note the possibility of making their sonic archive accessible through netlabels like Pueblo Nuevo and Jacobino Discos, which has indeed happened through the latter (Ibid.). I feel it is safe to assume that the Mapuche musician enlisted to record these samples was also aware of the possible uses of the resulting audio files, and, as such, endorsed this possibility through his participation in the project. However, I could not independently verify this.

a compilation. [They were OK with the idea] and we made it. (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/10/2013)

Having received the blessings of the compilers of the Mapuche sound archives, Flores put out a call through Jacobino Disco's netlabel web page and related social media circuits looking for creative submissions. This invitation encouraged participating artists to use the sound library as the primary, if not sole, source of audio material. At the same time, it granted any artist interested in participating the liberty to alter, superimpose, or otherwise manipulate these materials as they saw fit. Ultimately, the project netted a collection of 16 tracks contributed by separate acts that all grappled with the material from distinct stylistic and social perspectives.

From a purely aesthetic point of view, the resulting compilation is fascinating in its cohesive sensibility. The common source materials help to thread the album together, as similar samples often appear in more than one track. Shared instrumental timbres and textures and the reappearance of certain melodic and rhythmic motives characteristic of the Mapuche sample library as a whole also provide a sense of continuity, despite the divergent formulaic and stylistic contexts in which these sounds materialize throughout the album. Nonetheless, the particular allure of the *Aukin Mapuche* project arrives with its collective treatment of the complex subject matter.

While the Mapuche people have survived since pre-colonial times as one of the most resilient indigenous communities in the southern-cone region (Monsalve and Salas 2009), their relationship to the Chilean and Argentinean societies has been one of constant struggle. The origins of these socio-political conflicts stretch back to Spanish colonization, and particularly to the southward expansion of the Chilean state in the 19th-century. Steve Stern also relates:

During the dictatorship, losses of Mapuche lands, division of communities into smaller units, continuing educational neglect, persecutions including deaths and disappearances in activist areas, these constituted a new cycle of injustice – and sparked the indigenous social movement of the 1980s. (2010:207)

As this cycle of injustice and violence has continued to the present, with significant aggressions instigated from security forces and Mapuche activists alike, the plight of the Mapuche remains a subject steeped in controversy for all Chileans. For this reason, moreover, Pablo Flores's stated, "The Mapuche thing is always an issue... It's a subject everyone knows very well, you can ask anyone about the Mapuche [issue] and everyone has an opinion" (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/10/13).

Given this contested state of affairs, the exceptional aspect of the *Aukin Mapuche* compilation relates to the way it empowers its participants to publicly express their individual opinions and concerns on the matter through their creative treatment of the common source materials. What is more, a brief look at some of the submissions reveals the extent to which these individual contributions present varying perspectives on the theme, while combining to form a larger metanarrative.

The album begins with its most stridently political contribution, contributed by the Punta Arenas duo Lluvia Acida (see also chapters I and III). Entitled "Matías Catrileo," the track references its namesake, an unarmed Mapuche activist, who was shot and killed by Chilean security forces during a demonstration in 2008.³² It commences with an audio sample of Catrileo speaking for himself:

My name is Matías. The land recuperations are situated in a process that is very extended. At the center of it, what we are doing now is creating bases to enable us to reconstitute our nation, to be able to be Mapuche with our territory. We are actually oppressed by the State, we are not able to be Mapuche, we can't carry our

³² In elaborating on the events surrounding this death, historian Steve Stern relates: "The brute force, far out of proportion to any plausible threat and at odds with democratic policing, turned into a cause célèbre" (2010:345).

culture, we can't teach Mapuche to our children..." (Matías Catrileo, as quoted in the Lluvia Acida track "Matías Catrileo")

As the track advances, Catrileo's voice speaks alone for a full minute before Lluvia Acida gradually introduce layered audio clips from the Mapuche sample library into the mix. Among others, these textures include a short, energetic, melodic loop of a Mapuche *trompre* (horn trumpet), and a simple, yet powerful drumbeat assembled by layering and looping various samples of Mapuche percussion instruments.

With its energy and force Lluvia Acida's musical arrangement highlights the conviction encapsulated in Cartrileo's speech and the perceived virtue of his cause. However, this arrangement is also interesting insofar as the duo barely alter the original sound clips in the production process. Commenting on the sensitivity associated with this approach, Lluvia Acida's Rafael Cheuquelaf stated that, despite standing outside the Mapuche community, the theme was "not indifferent" to him, "its not something like, 'oh cool Mapuche sounds'" (Personal interview, Punta Arenas 4/11/13). Instead, he related that the duo's contribution to the project was intended to express solidarity with the plight of the Mapuche and to underscore the tension, subjugation, and violence that often characterize their interactions with the State. He also explained how, for this reason, the duo purposefully arranged the piece so that the voice of Catrileo and the excerpts of the Mapuche instruments might speak for themselves (i.e. without alteration) as much as possible.

The explicitly political stance taken by Lluvia Acida in the compilation's lead track represents only one of many. Even as other contributors shared similar feelings of solidarity, and as this initial track helps to frame the interpretation of the production as whole, other artists placed emphasis on differing aspects of the common theme. Pablo

Flores's (a.k.a. Aysén) own contribution, entitled "Ruca Buena,"³³ highlights the cultural distinctions and the strong connection to nature that characterize everyday Mapuche life. In the liner notes for his track, he states, "The process of being Mapuche is to feel, to recognize the blood and the space, to awaken to the grand giants of stone, wood, and water," and his musical approach to the sample library likewise attempts to invoke the essence of these elements in sound (<http://www.jacobinodiscos.cl/>). Gerardo Figueroa (see also chapters IV and V), for his part, offers commentary on the social dynamics of Mapuche identity in the urban context. In "El despertar de un ciudad (The Awakening of a City), he provides a sound art piece that alters the samples so significantly that they become entirely unrecognizable. He explained this creative approach as a commentary on the unfortunate social pressures that convince many Santiago residents to mask their Mapuche identity for social advancement (Personal conversation, Santiago, 3/24/13).³⁴

While additional contributions engage the Mapuche language, their ontology, and the loss of tradition, among other considerations, the end result is a mosaic production that exhibits a conversational meeting of ideas and creative perspectives on the issue at hand. As the individual contributions that comprise this collective work become further nuanced through juxtaposition with one another, this contributes to the formation of a larger narrative as well. Yet, rather than presenting this consensus view as the final word,

³³ The title references the thatched roof, conical dwellings (*rucas*) found in traditional Mapuche communities.

³⁴ Admittedly, a project that creatively engages and manipulates the sampled sounds associated with a marginalized indigenous community may raise some questions regarding cultural appropriation. Indeed, the fact that the project does not include the participation of Mapuche musicians themselves may make these questions are the more pressing. However, these concerns may be met, in part, with the understanding that the artists who participated in this project did so without commercial interest or personal gain. The artists I spoke with, in my estimation, also approached this creative project from a place of genuine empathy, interest, and concern; and this is something generally lacking in the dominant public sphere of Chilean society in regards to this issue.

the share-and-share-alike Creative Commons license that accompanies this production extends an invitation to further the creative conversation, to potentially encompass additional (remix) perspectives not included on initial compilation. For all these reasons, Pablo Flores thus summarizes the *Aukin Mapuche*'s impact as such:

I think the albums we make with collaborative people, with one theme, with a [shared] sound library, they were the most successful records with the media [meaning press, blog coverage, etc.]. And *Aukin Mapuche* [in particular] was *the* most successful. A lot of people tell us that Jacobino should make those things always – every year choose a theme and make a record, because it's always the best way to get people interested in a project and make the best [works].

The Synco Soundtrack

A second example of the compilation phenomenon, entitled *Synco Soundtrack* (Pueblo 2010), represents one of the most ambitious and expansive netlabel productions to date. Encompassing over four hours of music, a plethora of electronic and electroacoustic styles, and 36 individual acts from four nationalities, this album provides a 'soundtrack' to Chilean author Jorge Baradit's provocative 2008 science fiction novel *Synco*. In depicting an alternative history wherein the Chilean coup is averted and Salvador Allende's *Unidad Popular* regime lives on to realize a technological dystopia of its own, the *Synco* narrative offers ample fodder for the processes of creative conversation highlighted here. It also provided the inspiration for an innovative and deeply collaborative musical endeavor that could have only been conceived and realized in relation to the non-commercial, communal ethos of the netlabel movement.



Fig. 6.8. Cover art for the *Synco Soundtrack*

To begin, Baradit’s story revisits what was for many Chilean citizens the most traumatic and consequential event in their nation’s history. On September 11, 1973, in the interest of eradicating the perceived threat of Marxism, a military junta led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet ousted Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity government in a violent coup. Dozens, including Allende, perished that day. Thousands more were imprisoned, only to be later tortured, murdered, or disappeared. Chile’s revolutionary experiment with democratic socialism, initiated just three years before with Allende’s election, thus came to its dramatic conclusion, as the country’s history veered off on a very different trajectory, characterized by 16 years of neo-liberal transformation and oppressive dictatorship (see chapter II).

In delving into this polemical past, Baradit’s book poses a question that has animated the leftist imaginary in Chile for several decades: What if history had somehow chartered a different course? He sets his narrative in an alternate historical universe where Pinochet instead heroically halts the coup, and where the Allende regime lives on

to realize an ostensible utopia of technologically enhanced socialism. As a result, Baradit offers his readers an imaginary, retro-futuristic landscape, as a means to ponder the continuing legacy of real world events in Chile.



Fig. 6.9: Recreation of the Synco prototype control room, itself inspired by science fiction, and particularly by the deck of the Starship Enterprise from the *Star Trek* series.

In addition to outlining broader themes, Baradit's book revisits another obscure aspect of the nation's true past, and one that makes the story particularly relevant as the theme of an electronic music compilation. In the early 70s, in order to coordinate the country's increasingly nationalized industries, Allende and his ministers envisioned a network of electronic communication that presaged the modern Internet. Labeled *Cybersyn*, or *Synco*, this program never reached full functionality before the regime's demise, although a prototype of the control room was established in the basement of the capital building, La Moneda (see Fig. 6.9). In Baradit's universe, however, the *Synco* project comes to full fruition. It is this cybernetic reality that, in turn, stabilizes the Chilean economy and helps to establish the country as a model socialist republic,

although, as the plot proceeds, it becomes apparent that not all is as it appears, and a series of nefarious plots eventually undermine the ideals of Allende's revolution in this universe as well.

Notably, in setting out to curate a musical soundtrack to complement the novel, the participating affiliates of the Pueblo Nuevo collective demonstrated their willingness to engage and negotiate the same themes of historical rupture and imaginary repair raised in the *Synco* narrative. Moreover, Mika Martini explains, "Pueblo Nuevo as a concept, as a label with some rebellion... connected perfectly with the idea of the novel, with its personalities, ...[and]... its reminiscence...for this era of the 70s" (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/27/2017). With its emphasis on cybernetic technology as a means for democratic socialist success, the book's themes resonated with the ideology of the netlabel medium, and with the electronic aesthetic of Pueblo Nuevo as well.

Thus recognizing the strong correlation in this regard, it was Lluvia Acida's Rafael Cheuquelaf who first proposed the concept of a compilation soundtrack to both the author and to Pueblo Nuevo's Mika Martini. With Baradit offering his full-fledged endorsement, Martini and Cheuquelaf then called upon dozens of notable electronic musicians and composers to participate. The overwhelming majority who expressed interest received an overview of the novel's storyline, and a three month window to contribute a work, with the only condition being that this somehow engage a theme or episode from the book. The resulting compilation, in turn, comprised 44 individual tracks, arranged in four album-length volumes, all made available through Pueblo Nuevo's website for free.

In relating this project to the themes of this chapter, it is important to first point out the significant creative innovations that characterize the *Synco* soundtrack. At the most obvious level, creating a musical soundtrack for a novel already suggests a pioneering concept, unprecedented in Chile and certainly uncommon elsewhere. At more than four hours long, the *Synco* project breaks with standard conceptions of duration for an album, or any form of bounded musical work as well. However, even beyond the innovations that characterize the project as a whole, a spirit of experimentation and creativity also abounds at the level of individual expression, as the non-commercial ethos and the camaraderie of the collective involved in the project encouraged the participating artists to break new ground.

As an example, this experimental impulse is particularly apparent on the lead off track for the compilation, entitled “5.1,” and composed by Gerardo Figueroa (see also chapters IV and V). As one of four 50-second tracks that serve as introductory “trailers” for each volume of the compilation, Figueroa’s piece includes just two elements – a fragment of text from a Salvador Allende speech, and a highly-distorted electronic texture, composed by sampling a 5-second clip from the revolutionary Chilean folksong (“La Batea,” by Quilapayún) and digitally stretching it to reach 50-seconds.

Though minimalist to the core, Figueroa’s approach remains incredibly effective in framing the dark mood and the sci-fi aesthetic encapsulated in the book. Yet Figueroa also uses the track to introduce the compilation as a whole with a carefully selected Allende quotation that reflects the intersections between the ideals of Chile’s socialist past, and those reflected in the contemporary netlabel movement:

The People fighting for their emancipation, logically, have to adapt to their own reality the tactics and the strategy that has led them to these transformations.

Chile, is a country where bourgeois institutionalism has functioned to the fullest, and where, within this bourgeois legality, the people, sacrificially, have been advancing, have been raising awareness, have been understanding that it is not within the capitalist regimes nor from reformism where Chile may reach the dimension of a country... (Salvador Allende from the documentary film *Dialogue of the Americas – Fidel/Allende*, as sampled in Gerardo Figuero's "5.1")

Much like the *Aukin Mapuche* project detailed above, the overall juxtaposition and dissolution of genre distinctions on the *Synco Soundtrack* also deserves attention. Indeed, in this compilation, Baradit's narrative serves as a programmatic thread that connects wildly disparate electronic music styles into a single, unified work. It incorporates electroacoustic music, plunderphonics, electronica, ambient, techno, hip-hop, among others. Explaining this diversity, moreover, Martini relates, "the original idea was for this [project] to serve as the soundtrack to an imaginary movie, so that all the tracks and the musical variants would appear mixed, without separation of style, in order to provoke in the listener different and contrasting sensations as they listen" (Personal interview, Santiago, 1/27/2013). This approach works remarkably well in relation to Baradit's book precisely because his narrative style is so diverse, as scenes of action and suspense are juxtaposed with moments of introspection. Furthermore, this juxtaposition of style and genre reflects yet another indication of the increased cross-pollination of the historically disparate fields of electroacoustic art music and more rhythmically oriented electronica.

Still, even with its innovative strides and its collaborative characteristics, the most intriguing aspect of the *Synco* project relates to its engagement with the controversial themes raised in the narrative, and the conversational context in which these themes are engaged. By inviting musicians to help construct an aural dimension to the alternate

universe initially envisioned by Baradit, the Pueblo Nuevo initiative cultivated discursive space for participants to creatively reflect upon the still contested events and personalities from Chilean history that animate the story. Furthermore, Baradit's book is incredibly abstract, touching on everything from metaphysics, to conspiracy theories, to the cosmovision of Chile's indigenous populations, among other intersections. As such, it also proposes more questions than it answers, thus presenting an intriguing prompt for others to insert their own perspectives and interpretations into its imaginary framework.

Illustrating this diversity perspective, on the one hand, some musicians consciously highlighted the more optimistic threads presented in the book. Lluvia Acida, for instance, describe their approach to the track "Unidad Popular Electronica," as such: "We were trying to imagine a militant hymn that could have been sung in this alternate reality, a mixture of the most propagandizing sound of the Chilean *nueva canción* with industrial electronica." With their contribution, therefore, they explicitly adopt the most iconic and anthemic sounds of the Allende era to figuratively assert their own identities as electronic musicians into this imagined and idealized landscape.³⁵ In a similar way, Electroacoustic composer José Miguel Candela also explained that in creating his piece "Camelot," "I thought about this paradise and I made some kind of bridge between this paradise [with] all the technological systems ... and the other paradise that is Camelot" (Personal interview, Santiago 12/3/2012). The allusion is one that Baradit makes in the

³⁵ Demonstrating the duo's penchant for multi-media productions, they also produced a remarkable video for this track, in which they play with visual imagery, both real and fabricated, to further enhance their composition's effect (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtkea52p0ys>). This approach ties into Baradit's own interest in fostering a multimedia dimension for his book, an interest that gave rise to an interactive website for Synco, to a series of YouTube trailers for the project, and to various promotional performances featuring musicians involved in the Soundtrack.

text, and Candela uses the electroacoustic medium to create a piece with a dreamlike quality that reflects his stated admiration for the lost ideological world of Allende.

On the other hand, other participants on the compilation call attention to Baradit's darker, more cynical themes. These artists seemingly latch onto an interpretation suggesting the inevitability of fate, and the façade of the so-called Chilean "miracle" – whether that of Pinochet's neo-liberal transformation, or the utopia of *Synco*, or even that suggested by Chile's more contemporary economic prosperity. This perspective manifests in several tracks on the compilation that revel in electronic dissonance, and even noise; and it is especially prevalent in the soundtrack's final track, "Miseria y Triunfo" (Misery & Triumph) contributed by the Chilean rap artist Soviet.

Hence, while Baradit remixes Chilean memory with his text, the musicians involved in the *Synco Soundtrack* provide remixes and re-contextualizations of their own. They realize these artistic and social statements by creatively selecting from a prism of symbolic possibilities referenced in Baradit's text and in the broader socio-political themes it raises. In juxtaposing these creative statements with others, in a spirit of collaboration and creative conversation, these also artists contribute to a larger social discourse, which in turn contributes to the sense of collectivism that binds the community formations of the netlabel movement at both the local and transnational level.

* * *

The remix and compilation projects highlighted in this chapter represent only a few examples of the deeply collaborative musical productions facilitated by netlabels, and more broadly, by the shifting art world circumstances of the digital age. Yet even beyond this, these circumstances point to other potentialities for collective social

interaction as well. By encouraging more participatory, multi-directional systems of media exchange, which value cooperation over competition, netlabels and other similar Internet platforms provide an impetus for the creation and maintenance of expansive social networks bound by shared interests and social commitments. By providing a means of communication through both creative expression and direct correspondence, these platforms also provide a context for meaningful social discourse. Moreover, while this social and creative exchange helps to establish new local/translocal community formations, these communities, in turn, play a role in further incentivizing collaboration and social discourse, as part of a dynamic feedback loop that speaks to the 21st century transformations referenced throughout this dissertation.

Chapter VII

Conclusion: Resist and Remain

Upon visiting Pueblo Nuevo's website in early 2013, I noticed that after eight years operating under the slogan "Chilean Music with Electronic Roots," the organization had unceremoniously replaced its motto with the more recalcitrant phrase "Resist and Remain." Given the prominent use of the original slogan in the label's promotion for so many years, the shift seemed significant. And indeed, when questioned, Mika Martini first explained that with Pueblo Nuevo's increasingly expansive scope, as characterized by its association with an ever-widening body of international contributors and appreciators, the initial focus on Chilean music now seemed myopic. As he related:

I changed it because, over time, the idea of publishing only Chilean music, it didn't make much sense. It was natural in the beginning to have it focused on Chilean music because we knew many more Chileans around us. But a netlabel that exists on the Internet, where there are no borders, it was a little absurd to limit it and say "No, here we are only Chileans," because this wasn't what happened. In reality, people from other places began to arrive [to the label]. So the slogan, it was like it already wasn't truthful, it wasn't the reality. We're not just Chilean... I believe we outgrew it. (Personal interview, Santiago 1/27/13)

On the one hand, the change of motto thus recognized the expansion of the Pueblo Nuevo community as well as its creative impact in a way that fulfilled many of the promises of the netlabel ideal at its inception. On the other hand, Martini acknowledged that the new phrase, "Resist and Remain," also represented a defiant response to a contrarian notion being circulated by some bloggers and commentators around this time. This suggested

that after barely a decade since its first appearance the netlabel movement might already be drawing to a close.

This view, as articulated in particular by the blogger Antonia Folguerra, whose article “Netlabels: El fin de una era [Netlabels: The End of An Era]” provoked Pueblo Nuevo to change its slogan, maintained that waning interest in the netlabel movement and the consequent closure or diminished output of many netlabels had resulted from a constellation of social and creative trends.¹ Folguerra suggested, for instance, that diverging creative interests, interpersonal conflicts, and competing demands for personal time and energy, when introduced into a context devoid of economic incentive, displayed a greater likelihood of disbanding the artistic collectives involved. Similarly, she observed how some netlabel collectives, or factions thereof, had decided to abandon the noncommercial principle of the platform in favor of commercial or quasi-commercial ventures that solicited payment or donations in exchange for digital audio releases, or that returned to the more traditional model of selling physical products like CDs, cassettes, and/or vinyl LPs. Most significantly, Folguerra also reasoned that diminishing interest in netlabels likely resulted from the phenomenon’s fading novelty. Noting how publishing works solely in digital format and even the notion of giving away music for free was already “not as exceptional as it was in 2003,” she observed that alternate options for free distribution, like Bandcamp and Soundcloud, along with music streaming sites like Spotify and Pandora, had in fact made these techniques increasingly commonplace. As such, she concluded:

‘Netaudio,’ as a concept and as a community, has been reduced to a nucleus of activists committed to facilitating unrestricted music, released with free licenses (Copyleft, Creative Commons), that is distributed for free, as part of a first

¹ <http://bzzzbip.tumblr.com/post/39595853738/netlabels-el-fin-de-una-era>

moment of collective cultural capital, in a way that at times gives the impression that many of these activists are interested in the philosophy more than music.

Although somewhat discouraging, the assertions made by Folguerra and others in her camp cannot be easily dismissed. It is true that the netlabel movement as a whole has lost some momentum in recent years, as influential labels have folded or transitioned in Chile and elsewhere. In those instances where this has been the case, a combination of the factors cited by Folguerra has also generally been the cause. Nonetheless, many of the exceptions to this trend – those netlabel collectives that have managed to ‘resist’ the pressures to dissolve and to ‘remain’ active and relevant – have realized remarkable accomplishments through their perseverance. And even beyond the examples that demonstrate continued relevance and expansion, it is important to recognize that the movement has played a significant role in advancing many of the trends that have ultimately contributed to its diminishing influence, particularly in peripheral markets like Chile.

First of all, in beginning to assess the legacy and impact of the netlabel movement to date, one should bear in mind that the necessity to create creative and social spaces where they did not previously exist represented a central impetus for the gestation of the netlabel platform at its inception. Especially in places like Chile, where the collapse of major label enterprises at the turn of the 21st century had left a near total vacuum for local music production and dissemination, netlabel initiatives stepped in to fill the void (see chapter III). They provided artists with a viable new medium and a context to foster creative partnerships, to experiment with innovative musical expressions, and to draw a potentially expansive collective audience for their works. Hence, the fact that some of the partnerships and/or acts cultivated in this manner eventually transformed into more

commercial/professional ventures does not diminish the catalytic significance that noncommercial netlabels had in reinvigorating the field of local music gestation during an unstable time. Rather, it supports the views of Free Culture advocates like Lawrence Lessig (2004, 2009) and Chris Anderson (2009), who maintain that the existence of vibrant ‘share economy’ sectors in a society can and often do provide important drivers for the commercial economy as well.

While the robust commercial independent music scene associated with Chile’s ‘new paradise of pop’ may have eclipsed the noncommercial netlabel scene in the region in recent years, the latter undeniably played a role in fostering the former. It offered an initial media platform to eclectic and innovative Chilean artists like Gepe and Fakuta, who have since gone on to enjoy considerable success in the Chile’s commercial independent music scene. It helped to establish networks of attention and appreciation for Chilean music productions beyond the nation’s borders. It also helped to pioneer the notion of disseminating music directly through the Internet, without a physical support medium, in a way that clearly inspired and paved the way for the distribution model of Chile’s most successful commercial music download site Portaldisc.com and other similar ventures (see chapter III).

Secondly, one should recognize that the unique nature of the netlabel medium, as an online platform without commercial incentive, has also played a fundamental role in nurturing expansive and collaborative social networks that in many instances have continued to exist if not expand even when activities directly related to netlabel engagement have decelerated or subsided. As outlined in chapter VI, the online social interactions initiated through collective participation in a netlabel often transform into

more direct correspondences sustained through offline encounters, cosmopolitan performance circuits, and/or collaborative ventures realized through other media. In many instances, these non-netlabel-related interactions complement and coexist with continuing engagements facilitated by the netlabel platforms that helped to establish them. In others, however, the strength of the social networks and community formations developed in this way may relegate the actual netlabel sites to a non-essential or obsolete status within the evolving communication patterns of the collectives that formed around them. It is in light of these circumstances, therefore, that the dissolution of a netlabel like Michita Rex, which stopped releasing new works in 2013, may be seen not as a failed media venture, but rather as the chrysalis of a creative and collaborative community that remains connected in myriad ways to this day. Moreover, the same holds true for many individual netlabel participants, who may have reduced their affiliation with the platform in recent years precisely because previous engagements already satisfied many of the creative and social needs (like cultivating an audience, finding collaborators, and networking with like-minded artists) that attracted them to the medium in the first place.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the netlabel movement should also be recognized for its contributions in helping to realize a 21st-century paradigm shift that has dislodged once firm associations linking recorded music to commoditization, commercialization, and proprietary protections regarding intellectual property rights. Although peer-to-peer networking sites like Napster and Gnutella may have instigated the first wave in a consumer trend that began to view MP3 recordings produced by others as something that could be circulated and obtained without cost, the netlabel movement was part of a secondary wave that helped to pioneer the notion of artists freely sharing their

own musical productions in a similar way. With this shift, moreover, the field of recorded music dissemination opened itself to a whole new class of non-professional artists, interested in producing and circulating their music for the sake of creation and socialization alone.

Clearly, as articulated throughout this dissertation, this transition is also related to exponential leaps in the technologies of music production and dissemination, and to new opportunities for social networking via the Internet (see, for instance, chapter IV). However, netlabels are particularly notable insofar as they helped to organize these opportunities to serve an alternate set of ideological principles. In contrast to a 20th-century model of music production that focused on “selling sounds” through tightly controlled systems of commerce and coercion (Suisman 2009), the impulse behind the netlabel movement sought to open up alternative cultural spaces dedicated to more participatory models of creative exchange and social engagement. To this end, the movement played a part in popularizing Creative Commons, as an innovative creative licensing arrangement. Similarly, it helped to normalize the notion that at least some recorded musical expressions might exist as a common cultural resource, to be freely reimagined and re-contextualized, in much the same way that more communal music traditions evolved unimpeded for millennia before the idea of intellectual property rights and the reality of recording technology came along. What is more, the fact that additional opportunities for noncommercial music distribution and promotion have surfaced in recent years to divert interest and attention away from netlabels by serving a similar function should also not be seen as a failure of the netlabel movement or its objectives. Rather, this scenario illustrates the expansion and increasing acceptance of the core

principles that underscored this movement and that generally remained more significant to its participants than the actual mediums through which they were realized. These principles include the notion that one might be able to create and promote musical expressions, and to freely share these productions with friends and strangers, without engaging in the potentially corrupting, complicated, and time-consuming entanglements associated with the music business. They also include the concept that anyone who wishes to participate in this creative activity should be able to do so in some capacity (see also chapter IV).²

With all this said, however, at this moment the netlabel movement itself is still far from over. While the numbers of netlabels that actively release material may be slowly decreasing, quantitatively speaking, many of the netlabels that remain have continued to expand their creative and social relevance over the years. In certain instances, these organizations have in fact become stable institutions that unite local musical scenes to a much wider transnational pool of participants and collaborators. Further still, as the movement has been reduced to “a nucleus of activists committed to facilitating unrestricted music,” in the words of Folguerra, this has also made it somewhat easier for those netlabel collectives that remain to identify others and to band together to realize overarching ventures that more closely unite the movement as a whole. In fact, as an example, in 2015 an initiative entitled “Netlabel Day,” which sought to revive and reconnect the transnational movement, orchestrated a large-scale event that encouraged

² For instance, in specifically addressing the issue of openness with regard to netlabel participation in a roundtable discussion held at the University of Michigan in October 2015, Mika Martini acknowledged that the netlabel that he directs does have strict content guidelines that restrict those who may release works through the site. However, he also stated that the movement as a whole is open, insofar as any person, who might be excluded from existing netlabel collectives, has the freedom to create his or her own netlabel and to cultivate a collective of similarly minded artists to populate its catalog with their works. In fact, he noted that many netlabels had formed in precisely this manner.

netlabels from around the world to release a new work (or multiple new works) on the same day. Symbolically held on Bastille Day (July 14), the event was organized through a Facebook page and a website that both linked to participating netlabels and allowed participants to promote their works through these platforms. Remarkably, since becoming an annual endeavor, the event's manifesto advertises itself as "open to every single netlabel in the world," and counts among its contributors 132 netlabels from 30 countries, including 15 from Chile.

With the exception of Michita Rex, the Chilean netlabels highlighted in this dissertation remain vibrant fixtures in their national music scene and throughout the region as well. In 2016 Jacobino Discos celebrated its 50th release with a large-scale compilation project that included 50 contributions from 50 artists, who have all released music through the netlabel in some capacity throughout its 12-year history. In 2015 Pueblo Nuevo jointly celebrated its 10th anniversary and its 100th release with an even more ambitious compilation that included creative and often musically inflected messages from 100 distinct acts (including me) from several nationalities.³ Likewise, the Valparaíso-based netlabel EpaSonidos remains vibrant, having just launched its 95th release as of March 2017.

Proving their impact has grown beyond the insular dynamic of artists producing works to be appreciated primarily by other artists, the musical output of these netlabels has also garnered recognition from a wider audience of appreciators in Chile and beyond. For example, in 2016, a Jacobino Discos release by the improvisatory electronica trio C/VVV, comprising Pablo Flores, Mika Martini, and Fernando Mora, won a Pulsar Prize for "Best Electronic Music Artist" with their album *Por Todo No Es Todo*. Representing

³ In March 2017 Pueblo Nuevo released its 117th release with no signs of stopping anytime soon.

the Chilean equivalent of a Grammy, this award was a tremendous accomplishment for Jacobino Discos, and for the entire Chilean netlabel scene. It provided Pablo Flores, who accepted the award on behalf of the group, an opportunity to address the most prominent Chilean artists and music industry insiders from the podium, and to advocate for the netlabel movement's commitment to foster noncommercial space for musical innovation and creative collaboration. At the same time, this achievement also challenged a critique leveled at the netlabel movement by the director and founder of Portaldisc.com, Sebastian Milos, who once suggested that while to him netlabels seemed to be “a very creative portal... the fact is, the free path doesn't achieve any success” (Personal Interview, Santiago, 12/4/2012).



Fig. 7.1: Cover art for Pueblo Nuevo's 10th Anniversary Disc *Di Algo* [Say Something] and the Jacobino Discos release *Todo No Es Todo* by the trio C/VVV

For its part, Pueblo Nuevo also won a FONMUS grant from the Chilean ministry of culture in 2016, in recognition of its role as a medium dedicated to the promotion of Chilean music at home and abroad. The acquired funds allowed the organization to complete an extensive overhaul of its website. It re-launched in 2017 with an impressive

new layout that featured the reorganization of its entire catalog and its artist information pages, as well as an updated net 3.0 format that made its music more easily accessible by modern operating systems and mobile technologies. Amazingly, at the time of this writing, Pueblo Nuevo embarks on its 12th year in existence and seems more vital and prolific than ever been before. Moreover, as a further indication of its expanding recognition in the regional electronic music scene, the label released no less than six of the albums nominated for the Pulsar Prize for “Best Electronic Music Artist” to be chosen in 2017 (with another two produced by artists who have formerly released works through the venue).

In conclusion, the success and sustainability of Pueblo Nuevo in particular seems to suggest the possible institutionalization of the netlabel model in Chile going forward.⁴ Regardless of its eventual trajectory, however, insofar as Pueblo Nuevo and other longstanding netlabels like Jacobino Discos and EpaSonidos have cultivated a revolutionary new art world for the gestation of and dissemination of electronic music, their influence and impact is likely to be long remembered and appreciated in the region and beyond. The creative opportunities supported in this context have fundamentally transformed the music produced in its midst – most notably, by bringing the previously disparate worlds of beat-driven electronica and abstract electroacoustic music in to closer contact, and by thus enabling a crosspollination of influences and the fostering of experimental hybrid styles (see chapter VI). What is more, the social networks developed through these netlabel venues have been tremendously influential in also giving rise to vibrant and eclectic performance circuits for this music, which did not exist in Chile

⁴ This comes as similarly successful netlabels have become fixtures in their own local music scenes elsewhere as well

when the netlabel scene originated. In addition to this, it is important to point out that Pueblo Nuevo's acquisition of FONMUS support indicates a shift in cultural policy that is, in turn, tied to a shifting ideological balance in Chile.⁵ This shift has been affected in large part by the larger socialist movements and mobilizations in the region, whose convictions resonate with many of the principles reflected in both the message of the netlabel medium and in much of its content. Thus, to the extent that the netlabel movement sought to play some small role in helping to illustrate and imagine the possibilities of a alternative cultural framework in Chile, where viable, noncommercial, and participatory enterprises might exist alongside their commercial counterparts, it would seem, at least for now, that these efforts have achieved their intended result.

Epilogue

In October 2015, just over three years after the initial *Exploradores del Sonidos* concert detailed at the outset of this dissertation, a delegation of Chilean electronic musicians arrived in Ann Arbor to realize a brief residency at the University of Michigan. This series of events included roundtable, podcast, and classroom discussions wherein the participating artists – Pablo Flores, Mika Martini, and Lluvia Acida's Rafael Cheuqueulaf and Hector Aguilar – outlined their pioneering work in the netlabel medium. It also featured a capstone performance hosted in the University's Stamps Auditorium where these musicians presented the third iteration of what has now become a travelling

⁵ Indeed, while under the conservative administration of Sebastian Piñera (2010-2014) the stated policy for the allocation of FONMUS funds was directed to cultural interests that demonstrated some commercial potential (see chapter III), the provisioning of financial support to an organization like Pueblo Nuevo, which maintains an explicit dedication to the noncommercial cultural production and dissemination, demonstrates the shifting priorities toward cultural endowments under the left-leaning administration of Michele Bachelet.

Exploradores del Sonido exhibition highlighting the works of a rotating coterie of multi-media artists. In this instance, the event promised the students, faculty, and members of the general public in attendance “An Encounter with the Electronic Sights and Sounds of South America,” and it did not disappoint.

For these musicians this journey represented a pilgrimage of sorts, a chance to visit and perform in the vicinity of Detroit – one of the great fountainheads of electronic music. It also provided an opportunity to countermand a longstanding trend in their cultural experience, by allowing them to perform *their* musical styles and share *their* experiences and values in a nation that has for so long been the source of cultural and sociopolitical intrusions elsewhere around the world.

Beyond all this, however, this encounter also illustrated some of most fascinating possibilities of the transnational netlabel movement and of social and creative exchange in the digital era. In 2010, I encountered the Pueblo Nuevo website for the first time. Intrigued by its music, and its revolutionary approach to music dissemination, I reached out to the organization’s director Mika Martini. Over the next few months we engaged in email correspondence and when I visited Chile for the first time later that year we chatted in person for the first time at a small Santiago café. Over the next few years our interactions expanded to form the basis of the ethnographic portions of this dissertation; and in 2015 he and his colleagues responded to my invitation to travel across the world to visit and perform in my hometown.

In this way, my investigations into the netlabel movement, its music, and its social dynamics became part of the very story I intended to tell. Indeed, from the perspective of the *Exploradores del Sonido* performers, this whole scenario represented the realization

of many of the objectives they had hoped to achieve when they first developed and released their music through the netlabel medium. They had put their music out into the world to attract attention from wherever it may come, to build relationships around shared interests and convictions, and to travel and explore the world through performance. Ann Arbor had become just another stop along the way.⁶



Fig. 7.2: Exploradores del Sonido concert flyer

⁶ Incidentally, in 2016 Rafael Cheuquelaf completed an impressive documentary and performance film that detailed the entire *Exploradores del Sonido* expedition to the United States. It can be accessed at: <https://vimeo.com/157459550>.



Fig. 7.3. Lluvia Acida (above) and Mika Martini (aka Frank Benkho) performing in Ann Arbor, October 2015.



Fig. 7.4 The Exploradores del Sonido in Detroit, October 2015. (From left – Rafael Cheuquelaf, Hector Aguilar, Mika Martini, Pablo Flores, Fernando Mora)

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Appendix: “Whyno?” Transcription

Whyno

Mika Martini

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for Panpipes, showing a melodic line with a few notes. The second staff is for Electric Piano, featuring a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many notes and dynamic markings. The third staff is for Percussion, and the fourth is for Drum Set, both showing rests throughout the system.

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for P.P. (Panpipes), showing a melodic line with a few notes. The second staff is for Electric Piano, featuring a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many notes and dynamic markings. The third staff is for Perc. (Percussion), and the fourth is for D. S. (Drum Set), both showing rests throughout the system.

72

Whyno

P.P.

12

Perc.

12

D. S.

78

P.P.

12

Perc.

12

D. S.

Whyno

24

P.P.

24

Perc.

24

D. S.

30

P.P.

30

Perc.

30

D. S.

4
Whyno

P.P.

Perc.

D. S.

P.P.

Perc.

D. S.

The musical score for 'Whyno' on page 5 consists of three systems of music, each with four staves. The first system covers measures 45 to 48, the second system covers measures 54 to 57, and the third system covers measures 59 to 62. The notation includes piano (P.P.), percussion (Perc.), and double bass (D.S.) parts. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The piano part features a melodic line with some rests and a final note in the first system. The percussion part has a complex, rhythmic pattern with many notes and rests. The double bass part has a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with various dynamics and articulation marks.