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'Digital indigestion': cumbia, class and a post-digital ethos in Buenos Aires

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Abstract

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

On 28 July 2012, Nena Mala goes onstage at Pasión de Sábado, Argentina's Saturday afternoon cumbia TV show, and launches into a dizzying medley that covers three musical genres – including a frenetic 10-second techno break – within the first minute.[1] There are three musicians and two instruments on stage: at the centre, a laptop DJ, plus two singers, one with a keytar. All are syncing; the audible sound is playback from a recording.

A week later, Chancha via Circuito and Tremor, signed to local label ZZK Records, perform at Tecnópolis, a huge science and technology park on the outskirts of Buenos Aires that also serves as an alternative music venue. Chancha is known as a laptop DJ/producer, yet he sings folkloric songs and plays a frame drum, accompanied by his singing teacher, Miriam García.[2] His computer lies unused at the side of the stage. During Tremor's set, a laptop lines up alongside folkloric drums, Andean tarka flutes, stringed instruments and an analogue synthesiser. The group's performance aesthetic is more hard rock than the 'checking emails' style often associated with computer music.

Since 2000, Buenos Aires has emerged as a major centre of electronic dance music (EDM) in Latin America. Alongside serving as a regional hub for international music, it has also seen the creation of new styles. Laptop producers have mixed Latin American popular and folk musics with globally circulating electronic genres like techno, dub and dancehall to create new hybrids – first electro-tango, then digital cumbia and digital folklore. ZZK Records played an important part in popularising

[1] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfITJssbU7s.
[2] For a very similar performance, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPO-MT6zkiI.

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digital cumbia. Founded by Grant C. Dull (aka El G), Diego Bulacio (aka Villa Diamante) and Guillermo Canale (aka Nim), it began life in 2006 as a weekly club night and coalesced into a label in 2008.

I set off for Buenos Aires in October 2011 to undertake six months' fieldwork as part of a larger project to research how digital technologies were mediating music around the globe, taking ZZK Records and digital cumbia as a case study.[3] On arriving, however, I found both the digital and cumbia in retreat within ZZK. As at Tecnópolis, performances by ZZK artists increasingly took place in non-club environments and put conventional instruments centre stage, while cumbia had ceded ground to *folklore* (music rooted in rural areas and the mestizo population). Alongside Chancha and Tremor, La Yegros and Mati Zundel focused on folkloric traditions, while Cristian del Negro (Fauna) and El Remolón developed folkloric side-projects.

Outside the ZZK sphere, however, the middle-class alternative music public – ZZK's primary audience – was far from abandoning cumbia. In fact, since 2009 there had been a surge in popularity of retro cumbia orchestras, large ensembles playing predominantly acoustic instruments and focusing on traditional repertoire from Colombia and the Andes. The emergence of these middle-class orchestras was a significant development, given the long association of cumbia in Argentina with the *clases populares* (popular, i.e. lower, classes) and the history of pejorative attitudes to the genre by the middle and upper classes.

Meanwhile, in wider society, digitised cumbia was in fact becoming more audible – indeed, a form of digital cumbia was consolidating itself as *the* commercial music of the moment. Los Wachiturros' song 'Tírate un paso' was a huge hit in mid-2011; the group's appearance on Pasión de Sábado received nearly 20 million views on YouTube over the next 18 months. As a result, many similar groups were quickly formed, including Nena Mala, and by mid-2012 a new sub-genre had coalesced, sometimes called *música* (or *cumbia*) *turra*, with a considerable presence on television and in dance venues.

To generalise, then, middle-class alternative musicians and audiences were drawing somewhat away from digital cumbia towards neo-folklore and retro cumbia, showing diminishing fascination with the computer. Simultaneously, laptop cumbia was emerging as a major new force in the mainstream, commercial cumbia sphere, dominated by the popular classes. These developments appeared intriguing in light of scholarly studies of cumbia (and Latin American popular music more generally) and prevailing ideas about new technologies.

The idea of cumbia as a marker of working-class or subaltern identities runs through research on the genre, such as the most comprehensive volume to date in English (Fernández L'Hoeste and Vila 2013a). The topic of the genre's recent crossover to the middle class is little more than broached, if in thought-provoking ways, at the end of chapters on Colombia (Fernández L'Hoeste 2013) and Peru (Tucker 2013). Similarly, while Argentinean sociologists have paid considerable attention to *cumbia villera*, with its intimate connection to the urban poor in the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. Semán and Vila 2011; Vila and Semán 2011), the genre's recent adoption by middle-class musicians and audiences in Buenos Aires has attracted minimal academic attention.[4] Much analysis remains to be done, then, on

[3] 'Music, digitisation, mediation: towards interdisciplinary music studies'.
[4] Irisarri's (2011) master's thesis is the only notable exception to date.

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the changing relationship between cumbia and class, and on the distinct mechanics and meanings of cumbia's class transitions in different parts of Latin America.

The appropriation and legitimation of other working-class musics by the middle and upper classes has been a central topic in Latin American popular music research, addressed in key studies of national genres such as son, samba, tango and merengue (e.g. Collier *et al*. 1995; Austerlitz 1997; Moore 1997; McCann 2004), with scholars often paying attention to the significant role played by new technologies (particularly radio). Since this process was concentrated in the early 20th century, research methods have been primarily historical. However, a similar transition involving cumbia in Buenos Aires in the 21st century presented an opportunity to take an ethnographic approach to this subject.

Tucker points to intense debate in Peru about whether this crossover indicates a narrowing of class and ethnic divisions. I argue that moves towards such social rapprochement in Buenos Aires are undercut by a new separation in the sphere of technology and associated aesthetics. I treat class as a subjective category defined by actors in a social setting and constructed with reference to a varying set of criteria including income, occupation, ethnicity, place of residence, education, cultural preferences and lifestyle. Historically, attachment to cumbia commonly served as a marker of working-class status but, as musical tastes have become more eclectic across society, the role of genre has diminished while that of technology and aesthetics has increased, shifting the spotlight onto ways of producing and consuming cumbia and their reinscription of class boundaries.

With regard to new technologies, the digital divide has attracted much attention from the Argentinean government (e.g. Cultura Argentina 2012), and it has been taken as axiomatic by both politicians and scholars that this divide marks a class division (e.g. Wortman 2012). If cumbia and rock have historically been placed on opposite sides of a class line (Fernández L'Hoeste and Vila 2013b), the same has been true more recently of digital scarcity and abundance. However, the rapid spread of digital technology in the last few years means that this depiction is now problematic, a point underlined by the emergence of middle-class cumbia orchestras and *música turra*. I argue that the concept of the post-digital provides a useful interpretative frame for these recent developments in popular music in Buenos Aires and, potentially, for similar ones elsewhere. As the digital divide narrows, a post-digital divide has opened up and class distinctions have coalesced around this new line, undermining a core proposition within Argentinean technological and cultural policy – that reducing the digital divide will lead to the reduction of social divisions. Accordingly, and following Bartmanski and Woodward (2013), I suggest that the technological and aesthetic choices of middle-class cumbia musicians should be read as more complex and significant than simple nostalgia or 'retromania' (Reynolds 2011).

Digital inclusion: state policies since 2003

A catastrophic economic crisis in 2001 culminated in the election of the centre-left, populist president Néstor Kirchner, who was succeeded by his wife, Cristina, in 2007. Central elements in the Kirchners' political philosophy include a commitment to social inclusion, national sovereignty and regional solidarity.[5] These priorities are

[5] I use the word 'regional' to denote the region of Latin America rather than the Argentinean provinces.

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manifested in the framing of policies in spheres including new technology and culture, for example, flagship government initiatives such as Argentina Conectada (the fibre-optic cable network) and Open Digital Television (Cultura Argentina 2012). Conectar Igualdad, a programme to distribute 3.5 million netbooks to school pupils, is intended to reduce digital, educational and social divides across the country. Similarly, Igualdad Cultural aims 'to foster the conditions to bring about equality of opportunity across the country with regard to the creation and enjoyment of cultural goods, and access to new forms of communication'.[6]

Tecnópolis, the state-sponsored science and technology park, also reflects the government's priorities: 'It is a display of what we Argentineans were and are capable of when we advance along the path of knowledge, creativity and innovation. It is also an event for the masses that has been seized by the Argentinean people as a space for meeting and celebration.'[7] While the park is designed to foster a cutting-edge, high-tech national imaginary, it is also a venue for alternative musicians, using music to attract and entertain the public.

The government is thus committed to social and digital inclusion. By the end of 2011, 66 per cent of the population had Internet access, the highest proportion in Latin America. Forty-two per cent had a Facebook account, and Argentinean users spent more time connected to it than those from any other country (Castro 2012).[8] In the city of Buenos Aires, more than 90 per cent of homes had Internet accessibility, although in the surrounding province only 34 per cent did. Nevertheless, digital technology had become widespread, and in greater Buenos Aires access was the norm.

Cumbiópolis

If state policy has addressed the digital divide, another, less purposive kind of bridging has taken place in the cultural realm. It has focused on cumbia, a genre of Colombian origin that was popularised in Argentina in the 1960s and is today the country's third most widely consumed music, after rock and *folklore* (Magariños and Taran 2009, p. 18). Its popularity in the capital appears even greater; if the poet and lyricist Horacio Ferrer once labelled Buenos Aires 'tangópolis', today 'cumbiópolis' might be more accurate.

As cumbia has been associated historically with the popular classes, particularly poor rural-to-urban migrants and immigrants from neighbouring countries, it has long been the object of prejudice from the middle and upper classes. If acceptance grew somewhat in the early 1990s, pejorative attitudes soon returned as neoliberal policies and the subsequent economic crisis gave rise to a new variant, *cumbia villera*, which articulated the lower classes' sense of alienation through brash, often grating sounds and lyrical tropes of sex, drugs and crime. With *chetos* (posh people) often a target in lyrics and live commentary, *cumbia villera* symbolised the period's social exclusion and polarisation.

By 2011, however, there was a growing middle-class cumbia scene, with laptop producers joined by cumbia orchestras. There were precedents for middle-class incursions into cumbia production going back at least to the 1980s, but they tended

[6] See http://www.igualdadcultural.gob.ar/institucional/planigualdadcultural/.
[7] See http://tecnopolis.ar/2012/acerca_de.
[8] See http://www.internetworldstats.com/sa/ar.htm and http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats10.htm#spanish.

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to be isolated, were often framed in terms of novelty or kitsch, and did little to alter the widespread middle-class prejudice against the genre (Guerra n.d.). In 2011, though, something more profound and extensive appeared to be afoot. Musicians identified twin forces behind this shift in practices and attitudes: the impoverishment and the Latin Americanisation of the traditionally Eurocentric Buenos Aires middle class, both processes with roots in the 2001 crisis and the subsequent regionalist political turn. The middle class was drawn closer – both economically and culturally – to the Argentinean popular classes and to the middle class in other Latin American countries, and away from the European middle class with which it had historically identified. Middle-class musicians' descriptions of cumbia as 'the spinal cord of the Americas', 'the empress of the Americas' and 'Bolívar's dream come true' illustrated the connection between the genre's increasing legitimacy and rising regionalist sentiments.

The press reaction to this middle-class cumbia boom was positive. Articles appeared in mainstream newspapers – traditionally cumbia-free zones – exploring the rise of these orchestras and the growing interest in Latin American musical traditions, and applauding the breaking down of barriers and taboos (e.g. Sánchez 2014a). In *Clarín*, Pedro Irigoyen (2013) described a new generation of middle-class Argentinean *cumbieros* that was exploring the genre's Colombian roots, producing 'another kind of cumbia, more purist, Latin and close to its origins'. He quoted Matías Jalil (of Orquesta Popular San Bomba), who placed this movement in broader historical context: 'From Chávez to Evo (Morales), there are many things that were unthinkable in the 90s. Today there is a more Latin Americanist spirit across the continent.'

With cumbia starting to lose its status as a marker of class distinction, there were signs of greater social cohesion within the realm of popular music. Alongside state initiatives for digital inclusion, cumbia was apparently undergoing a shift from an expression of social exclusion around the turn of the millennium to a space of social integration a decade later.

'My Facebook Girl' versus 'Digital Indigestion'

We are now in a position to analyse more deeply the three kinds of cumbia outlined at the start. *Música turra* is a genre that foregrounds the digital: the laptop is the central and sometimes only instrument visible, and the music is highly inflected by the dominant Latin digital genre, reggaetón. Digital sampling is central to its production process, which involves overt borrowing from foreign artists and other *turra* groups, and to its aesthetics. The genre derived its name from its initial audience of *turros* – a fusion of cumbia fans with members of the digital urban tribe 'floggers' (from the website Fotolog) who consumed digital genres like reggaetón and electro.

Los Wachiturros' success was a profoundly digital phenomenon. The group achieved a high level of exposure through Facebook, YouTube and other websites. In 2011, the top two search terms on Google in Argentina were Facebook and Wachiturros (Mascardi n.d.). Video remixes of 'Tírate un paso', set to clips of *The Simpsons* and the Mexican comic character El Chavo, received millions of views, and hundreds of YouTube videos of children and teenagers dancing the song's choreography revealed the digital fluency of its consumers (or prosumers).

Another *turra* group, Los Nota Lokos, had a hit with the song 'Mi nena Facebook' (My Facebook Girl), an elegy to social media, computers, digital cameras

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and Photoshop that received 27 million hits on YouTube. Nena Mala released 'PIN', an ode to Blackberry messenger. *Música turra*'s multi-layered imbrication with the digital points to the rising access to and fascination with this technology on the part of its producers and consumers. *Música turra* might be considered the soundtrack to the digital inclusion of Argentina's popular classes.

If middle-class cumbia articulated a growing regionalism, *música turra* suggested a contrary movement: a flourishing cultural cosmopolitanism on the part of the popular sectors. The adoption of techno sections in *música turra* was particularly suggestive, given the music's strong European associations. Indeed, the directors of Nena Mala's management company, JR Producciones, travelled regularly to Europe to update themselves on European fashions. Furthermore, their main music producer, KR Pro, revealed that his sound was heavily influenced by US Latino electro music. Historically, it has been the upper and middle classes that have looked to the Global North for cultural direction; in recent cumbia, we can hear the popular classes doing the same, while the middle class turns increasingly towards Latin American roots.

While *música turra* producers released paeans to new technologies, ZZK's middle-class artists, among the pioneers of digital cumbia in Argentina, developed more ambivalent attitudes, showing an increasing interest in the folkloric and the acoustic. Their perspectives were encapsulated by the title of an album by label cofounder and digital DJ Villa Diamante: *Empacho Digital*. *Empacho* means excess, overdose or indigestion. Villa Diamante saw new technology as overloading and consuming people, and his three-CD set of mash-ups was designed to provoke an experience of digital indigestion in the listener.

While ZZK's first two compilations (released in 2008 and 2009) were highly electronic and dance-floor-oriented, reflecting the label's origins as a club night and several artists' backgrounds as EDM DJs, more recent albums and performances have showcased a wider range of musical influences and tempos, and the laptop has ceded ground to traditional instruments and a more conspicuously live aesthetic. Leo Martinelli (director of Tremor), Mati Zundel, Chancha via Circuito and El Remolón all started out working solo with just a laptop, and all subsequently shifted to an ensemble format, also increasingly playing conventional instruments themselves. ZZK's newest and highest-profile signing, La Yegros, performed with a full band from the start. The last three artists are now capable of performing entirely acoustically. On one weekend in April 2012, Tremor and La Yegros played at the Buenos Aires International Folklore Festival, while El Remolón performed in a university art space with a seven-piece band, illustrating how far ZZK had come from its club and laptop roots. Such moves are not limited to ZZK: Tonolec, a successful neofolklore duo of keyboards/electronics and vocals, began performing in 2011 as an acoustic octet, aiming to imitate its own electronic sounds with live musicians. Once, the computer had been everything; now it was being literally and figuratively moved into the background.

Turning to our third cumbia strand, middle-class retro orchestras such as La Delio Valdez, Sonora Marta la Reina, Orkesta San Bomba, Todopoderoso Popular Marcial and Cumbia Club La Maribel have several elements in common: they are large (one to two dozen musicians), made up primarily or entirely of acoustic instruments, and play predominantly traditional(ist) Latin American repertoire. These groups attracted increasingly large audiences in 2011–2012; the Club de la Cumbia

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at Konex brought in up to 2,000 dancers, significantly larger than ZZK's events. The fact that these orchestras began to appear from around 2009, several years after the emergence of ZZK's digital cumbia, pointed to a certain shift in momentum away from laptop cumbia towards more traditionalist versions. Luciano Choque Ramos shelved a digital cumbia project, Imperio Diablo, to form the all-acoustic Todopoderoso Popular Marcial, exemplifying how this retro, acoustic trend constituted, in part, a critical reaction to digital cumbia.

Post-digitalism

These recent technological and aesthetic developments within the middle-class cumbia sphere may be illuminated by the concept of the post-digital. I first encountered this term via Patricio Smink, a Buenos Aires-based percussionist, DJ and producer. Although it has been in use for years, its meaning, location and visibility have fluctuated. However, most uses build on a view stated in 1998 by Nicholas Negroponte, founder of MIT's Media Lab: 'the digital revolution is over'.[9]

The term 'post-digital' was coined by Kim Cascone (2000) with reference to computer music genres like glitch. There was a flurry of interest from the computer music sphere in response. For Ian Andrews (n.d.): 'post-digital refers to works that reject the hype of the so-called digital revolution. The familiar digital tropes of purity, pristine sound and images and perfect copies are abandoned in favour of errors, glitches and artefacts.' He identified as post-digital a phase of computer music that dismissed post-modernist aesthetics and practices such as kitsch, pastiche and mash-up and, more broadly, a rejection of the idea of digital as representing progress or a teleological movement towards perfection. As Glenn Bach (2003, p. 3) put it, '"post-digital" suggests both a critique of digital culture and an evolutionary history that succeeds the digital revolution'.

After a lull of a few years, the term was taken up again, but predominantly in the spheres of art, design and business, and largely in online and social media. The core idea of this version of post-digitalism was that digital technology had become so normalised that, as Negroponte (1998) put it, 'like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only by its absence, not its presence'. Hence, the term post-digital rests on digital technology's penetration of most aspects of human life. For Charles Beckett, a digital technology advisor at Arts Council England: '[t]he process of entering the "post-digital" realm then is really a process of acceptance and integration, or digestion. Something that was first viewed as radical, alien and even threatening has now been internalised.'[10]

Post-digitalism generally involves attempts to approach the digital more critically. 'Post-' thus signifies modification, critique and counter-reaction rather than rupture, since digital technology continues to be widely used. If there is a temporal aspect, it describes a putative moment after digital saturation. For Florian Cramer (2014), 'the term "post-digital" can be used to describe either a contemporary disenchantment with digital information systems and media gadgets, or a period in which our fascination with these systems and gadgets has become historical'. Discussions of

[9] See http://artjunction.org/blog/?p=920.
[10] See http://www.howtothinkaboutthefuture.com/?p=81.

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post-digitalism are often driven by a sense of enquiry about what happens once digital technology becomes the norm.

One prominent response is the humanisation of digital technology, putting human beings and interactions at the centre of the picture.[11] According to Tom Uglow, Director of Creative Labs at Google: 'The idea that digital is something new and transformative is now quite old. So the question for most creatives is not about going digital – it's about making it feel less digital, about making participation and interaction feel post-digital; making the tech less techy.'[12]

A second response is a growing concern with materiality (physical objects, hybrid products, and interplay between the digital and non-digital), a theme explored by the 2012 NEXT Berlin conference on the post-digital.[13] Russell Davies, a creative director at the UK's Government Digital Service, argues that: 'screens are getting boring. It's really hard to impress anyone with stuff on a screen any more. [...] Whereas doing stuff in the real world still seems to delight and impress people. Really simple stuff with objects looks like magic.'[14] According to Cramer, the digital is increasingly perceived as either sterile high technology or low-quality trash. As a consequence, writes Davies, 'you can feel people turning back to the real. Designers want to express themselves in new objects, they want to connect to more senses, they want to feel the grain of new materials and understand the implications of weight and friction.'[15]

Post-digitalism may be seen as an exploration of alternative temporalities as well as materialities. If the digital is associated with rapidity, post-digital practices often involve a deliberate slowing down. The post-digital ethos shows parallels with movements such as Slow Living and its ever-increasing sub-varieties (Slow Food, Slow Media, etc.), with their critique of the frenetic pace of modern life (see, for example, Honoré 2004; Parkins and Craig 2006). A characteristic of post-digitalism, though, is a 'both/and' rather than an 'either/or' approach. As noted by JWT Intelligence, consumers' desire for the analogue and the physical 'coexist[s] with their embrace of tech-centric lifestyles; indeed, the stronger that embrace, the stronger the urge to experience the polar opposite'.[16] Post-digitalism is a technologically savvy, not Luddite, philosophy, articulating a desire to live according to contrasting temporalities simultaneously rather than a simple replacement of fast by slow.

Nevertheless, there are a number of anxieties underpinning the post-digital ethos – about dehumanisation, inundation, excessive accumulation, disposability and risks to artistic creativity. For Stephen Godfroy (2012) of Rough Trade, the digital is responsible for 'compulsive listening disorder'. The digital is increasingly seen as a threat rather than excitement, and the growth of expressions like 'digital holiday', 'digital diet' and 'digital detox' illustrates how many now perceive it as an extension of work or, worse still, a form of compulsion, addiction or illness.

[11] See, for example, arguments by Iskander Smit, director of the Internet agency info.nl (http://targetis-new.com/2011/12/23/the-many-aspects-of-a-new-post-digital-era/).
[12] See http://www.alpha-ville.co.uk/festival-theme/.
[13] See http://nextberlin.eu/2012/03/the-post-digital-week-18-mar/.
[14] See http://russelldavies.typepad.com/planning/2009/01/meet-the-new-schtick.html.
[15] See http://russelldavies.typepad.com/planning/2011/11/i-first-talked-about-post-digital-at-an-event-called-thinking-digital-in-2009-in-gateshead-looking-back-thats-probably-wh.html.
[16] See http://www.jwtintelligence.com/2013/03/embracing-analog-jwts-ann-mack-presents-sxsw-2/#axzz2RyJs796y.

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In recent years, occasional references to the post-digital in relation to music (e.g. Jenkins 2011) have broadened out from specific, niche genres like glitch to include the increasing valorisation of participation and interaction (live performances) and materiality (vinyl records and analogue electronic instruments). Digitalised music circulates easily but has limited exchange value (Cascone 2003); post-digitalism is thus driven in part by the exigencies of music capitalism, particularly the problem of falling sales of recordings. It also articulates with rising interest in attentive and ritualistic ways of listening, exemplified by the emergence of record clubs like Classic Album Sundays.[17] Post-digitalism is closely linked to current authenticity discourses about 'real' formats, listening and experiences. With the fetishisation of all things 'vintage', as the technology writer Frank Rose notes, there is a current trend to see the digital as the negative pole of the physical/real/old – pragmatic but unromantic and emotionally empty.[18] Analogue technology has thus become desirable, as evidenced by the panel 'Embracing analog: why physical is hot' at the 2013 SXSW festival.[19]

As Cramer (2014) writes, post-digital is 'a term that sucks but is useful'. It helps to draw out connections between recent developments in a range of creative fields and consumer practices, and to highlight commonalities in their philosophical underpinnings. Central to the definition of practices and objects as post-digital is their character as critical responses to digital tools and conditions; the perspectives and intentions of their creators and users are crucial. Hence, the term can lose its value if used indiscriminately as a synonym of non-digital or analogue. Similar objects and practices may have quite different meanings. For example, a vinyl record may be pre-digital (if old) or non-digital (if it represents a genre with a continuous vinyl DJing tradition, like hip hop). It should only be considered post-digital under particular circumstances, for example, if emerging from a formerly digital-only scene such as ZZK's.

ZZK and the post-digital

Post-digitalism provides a useful framework for understanding the trajectories of several ZZK artists. Chancha via Circuito started by sampling indigenous music; then he remixed a traditional song, 'Pintar el sol', sung by Miriam García and Alicia Solans; finally, he started taking folkloric music lessons with García herself and performing alongside her, singing duets – including 'Pintar el sol' – accompanied by hand-held frame drums. Andrés Schteingart began as a producer of minimal electronica under the alias of Drole; he signed to ZZK as El Remolón, performing laptop cumbia; and in 2011 he added three musicians to form El Remolón y su Conjunto. He had become dissatisfied with the 'black box' aspect of the laptop and felt that it imposed a rigid structure on music making; he found a band format more 'organic'. Mati Zundel shifted over time from composing at the computer (around a loop) to the guitar (around a riff or melody), preferring the latter as a basis for live performance.

[17] See http://classicalbumsundays.com.
[18] See http://www.deepmediaonline.com/deepmedia/2013/03/embracing-analog-at-sxsw.html.
[19] See http://www.jwtintelligence.com/2013/03/embracing-analog-jwts-ann-mack-presents-sxsw-2/#axzz2Ry Js796y.

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A counter-narrative to the idea of the digital as progress can be seen in such artists, who started out making European-style EDM on computers but moved towards more indigenous Latin American sounds and instruments. Their musical progression involved a kind of technological regression. Digital technology, rather than being the end point of a development from tradition to modernity, was instead a doorway or starting point for a journey back to roots – from the modern to the traditional, the European to the regional, the electronic to the acoustic, and the solo to the interactive. Six years after the birth of ZZK, there was an increasing sense that one man and his laptop was not the future after all.

Post-digitalism was evident in ZZK artists' increasingly critical perspectives towards digital technology; they were far from abandoning it, but were ever more aware of its limitations as well as its advantages. Villa Diamante followed his release of *Empacho Digital* by opening a record shop, arguing that music fans had gorged themselves on digital downloads and now needed to take a step back towards physical formats – a significant view coming from a leading digital DJ.

Tremor provides a good example of a group that uses digital technology in careful and self-critical ways and with an emphasis on hybridisation. Its three musicians combine digital, acoustic and analogue, with the last of these as 'the mayonnaise in the sandwich' – linking the extremes of computer and drum. Gerardo Farez claimed that the analogue synthesiser contributed to the liveness of their shows and described the very imperfection of analogue as its appeal: the sound is impure and the instrument can go out of tune during gigs, so the music is never the same twice. Camilo Carabajal argued that the drum provided a flesh-and-blood element that kept the music rooted. Leo Martinelli, although he operated the digital part of the 'sandwich', felt that digital software lent itself to 'thinking inside the box'. Tremor's equivocal view of digital technology, which it tempers with acoustic and analogue instruments, justifies labelling its music as post-digital folklore.

Patricio Smink (Figure 1), a regular collaborator with El Remolón and Villa Diamante, explained how learning to make music with the software package *Fruity Loops* (FL) had changed his thinking about percussion playing. He began not only to specialise in playing EDM rhythms live, but also to conceptualise what he did with his hands by imagining the music on screen. Furthermore, he reconfigured his playing on the basis of what he learnt from mixing music in FL: he came to understand the combination of sounds of different frequencies, and found FL's parametric equaliser function, which analyses the spectrum of frequencies of a given sound, particularly instructive. He now describes his style as post-digital percussion.

In bringing together digital thinking and acoustic playing, Smink might be seen as an archetypal post-digital musician. He imitates a kick and snare loop with one hand while playing improvised fills with the other, bringing together the sound world of digitised urban music with the flexibility and dialogic possibilities of live percussion. He illustrates the humanisation of digital technology that is considered a cornerstone of the post-digital ethos. According to Mel Alexenberg (2006, p. 35): '[p]ostdigital art is emerging from a vital dialogue between high tech and high touch experiences. It invites the rediscovery of ten fingers by adding the human touch to digital technologies.' A better example than Smink is hard to imagine.

Smink also describes his own band, Pimentón, as post-digital: an evolution from digital cumbia, maintaining the structural and aesthetic features of electronic music (such as the loop) but eschewing the earlier style's use of pre-recorded tracks and shifting the emphasis towards acoustic and analogue instruments, bringing flexibility and

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Figure 1. Patricio Smink offers workshops in post-digital percussion.

'blood' back into the rhythmic plane. Whereas ZZK's groups had transited from a purely digital to a more acoustic aesthetic, Pimentón was a next-generation group that hybridised from the start (and hence was 'born post-digital'). Smink explained the band's understanding of the character and role of each instrumental part:

> daily use of a DAW [digital audio workstation] gives you more perspective. When you can see every track on a multi-track, instead of thinking about what you're playing from an instrumentalist's viewpoint, you acquire a more holistic conception. Even more so if you know about audio mixing. You could say that audio mixing literally means finding each instrument's place in the sonic spectrum. An instrumentalist who understands this generally plays in a more minimalist style, finding their place in the sonic spectrum – in other words, 'mixing' with the other instruments at the moment of performance.

Pimentón strives towards a sound imagined as the shapes on the screen of a DAW yet realised to a considerable degree through the tactility of analogue and acoustic instruments.

Drivers of post-digitalism

While the concept of post-digitalism emerged from the Global North, it can be identified among middle-class cosmopolitans in Latin America. Like Slow Living, post-digitalism in Buenos Aires might be conceived of as both a *reaction against* various consequences of globalisation (such as a sense of social acceleration), and also *shaped by* processes of globalisation (the transnational spread of cultural ideas and practices). Many of the musicians discussed in this article have lived or travelled

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extensively overseas, and frequent visits to Buenos Aires by foreign artists bolster the constant circulation of ideas.

For example, Buenos Aires has participated in the transnational revalorisation of vinyl and analogue technology. Two record appreciation groups – the Vinyl Preservation Society and Vinilo Tinto – appeared in 2011. Their discourses were familiar from the Global North: a renewed interest in high fidelity sound, and a critique of contemporary listening devices, formats and habits. Vinilo Tinto (a pun on *vino tinto*, or red wine, which is served during collective vinyl listening sessions) rejects the mp3 and indeed many aspects of life in the digital era: 'In this era of hyper-mega-information, with music so over-exposed, our cultural resistance urges us to go back to enjoying music that passes from hand, is swapped, is inherited, is found in the street, or is searched for and bought like treasure.'[20] By 2014, releasing on vinyl had become fashionable for local independent labels and artists, despite the fact that (or perhaps because) there was no pressing plant in Argentina, and Sony had begun to rerelease old Argentinean vinyl records.

The global circulation of discourses can be observed in Paloma del Cerro, an artist closely connected to ZZK who gave up a high-flying advertising career to become a neo-folklore singer. One of her songs is called simply 'Lento' (Slow), and in a Facebook post she elaborated: 'Say yes to the slow and drawn-out – as slow as possible – put on the brake [...] Caribbean and Taoist philosophy!!!' Similarly, the organiser of Vinilo Tinto saw his vinyl appreciation as one facet of 'an almost Buddhist' desire to live more slowly and deeply. Wortman's (2012) study of Buenos Aires's 'creative class' in the 1990s and early 2000s shows self-fashioning through the early adoption and constant updating of new technologies and the celebration of speed, yet in 2011–2012 there were signs of a counter-movement: a certain distancing from high technology and a desire to slow down. Critical perspectives on the digital and its relation to music are thus embedded in wider critiques of contemporary urban living and attempts to imagine alternative lifestyles, fuelled by transnationally circulating ideas.

While post-digitalism is sometimes articulated as a counter-cultural ethos, it may also be driven in part by commercial concerns. Vinyl brings economic advantages for independent musicians: a record is perceived as a collectible object, and the profit margin per unit is greater than for other formats. Furthermore, in Argentina as elsewhere, declining sales of recordings have raised the economic importance of live performance and, consequently, a visually appealing show. Digital artists with professional ambitions are increasingly returning to band formats and conventional instruments for their visual impact. The post-digital turn is thus informed partly by global music industry changes.

If post-digitalism is a consequence of and reaction to globalisation, then we might expect to find it in similar contexts elsewhere in Latin America. Indeed, during a visit to Colombia in 2012, I found post-digital perspectives prevalent in the local equivalent of the ZZK scene (artists working at the interface of national musical traditions and globally circulating electronic genres). Bogotá producers such as Richard Blair, Teto Ocampo and Cero39, while expert users of digital technology, expressed complex, equivocal views of the digital, repeatedly harking back to a 'golden age' of technology and recording in the 1960s and 1970s. Several suggested that there was an

[20] See https://www.facebook.com/vinilotintocasaflorida/info.

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uneasy fit between the digital and Colombia's Afro-diasporic musical aesthetics, which they saw as rougher, looser, subtler and more flexible. Andrés Martínez (Monareta) described digital music as angular or square, whereas Colombian music was circular. Merlín Producciones in Medellín might be considered a post-digital production house, since staff articulated their aim to keep digital to a bare minimum and spoke of the romance and beauty of analogue. Analogue sound is like Colombia itself, said one: rough around the edges, imperfect, but alive.

Ondatrópica is a collaboration between leading 'new cumbia' group Frente Cumbiero (led by Mario Galeano), British producer and long-time Colombia resident Will Holland aka Quantic, and a number of older stars of Colombian music such as Fruko and Aníbal Velásquez. Galeano and Holland – both of them experienced digital producers and DJs – hired the legendary Discos Fuentes studio in Medellín, took its analogue recording technology out of storage, and recorded on tape. As music journalist Juan Data writes: 'They basically put together the tunes that they would go crazy for if they found on an old dusty pile of records at a garage sale in Cartagena. So much so that they took the effort of recreating the sound and aesthetics of the sought-after golden era recordings.'[21] The producers not only insisted on shunning digital technology at every stage of production, but also reverted to earlier recording techniques – what Toynbee (2000, p. 70) calls a 'documentary approach' – recording the whole group together (*en bloque*) in a large studio, in one take, with one or two mics. By rejecting the practice of multi-track recording, they rebelled against non-linear editing on a DAW. The resulting album was praised by music critics around the world, and the band toured extensively overseas.

Research in Colombia thus supports the proposition that a post-digital ethos circulates transnationally. Internet flows between Buenos Aires and Bogotá are bolstered by personal and professional connections between the two scenes discussed here (artists and label directors have travelled in both directions and interacted at festivals and trade fairs). Future research might explore whether post-digitalism is a significant development in alternative music in other parts of Latin America and beyond.

Localising post-digitalism in Buenos Aires

If the questioning or reversal of processes associated with digitisation draws on globally circulating discourses and practices, local developments also have distinctive features and causes. In Buenos Aires, ZZK's artists shifted from digital sampling to using live instruments partly for copyright reasons. Most of them started out by sampling voraciously and, as part of a small underground scene, with minimal concern for legality. But the scene grew in international visibility and in 2011 ZZK signed a management deal with Los Angeles-based Waxploitation, and from that point on all the label's releases had to comply with US copyright laws. The complexity and expense of clearing samples legally meant that artists increasingly preferred to play or sing the music themselves or engage local musicians to do so.

Similar practices may also have locally distinctive meanings. In Colombia, musicians framed the benefits of analogue in terms of national identity and musical aesthetics. In Buenos Aires, post-digitalism was articulated to the Latin Americanisation of the middle class since the 2001 crisis. Diego Pérez (Tonolec)

[21] See http://latinbutcool.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/ondatropica-soundway-2012.html.

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described his transition from an early and enthusiastic adopter of digital technology to a critical user who saw the computer as 'a tool that had reached me from somewhere else, as if an alien had appeared and left it'.[22] He explained:

> I feel that here, in Argentina and Latin America, there is a process happening that, for me, basically revolves around the 2001 crisis, that has to do with the fact that we saw the failure of a tool from overseas – capitalism – across Latin America, and we realised that tools are used in pursuit of an idea and an ideology [...]. [B]etween 1995 and 2005 we lived through a period when technology advanced in leaps and bounds, the possibilities for communication and the digital advanced a lot, and there was confusion in the minds of the majority of people and also of artists, where we found ourselves with many tools that were updated every month and there was like an abstract idea that you created better things when you had the best tool. So it wasn't that you had to develop something internally, but rather to buy the latest Mac because something new had come out or get the new [Ableton] Live software.

Pérez spoke of a national history of reception and imitation of culture and technology from overseas, allied with an undervaluing of the national. Pérez interpreted the growing interest in traditional over digital cumbia as a counter-reaction: 'at some point we realised that overseas too had its problems, that overseas too had systems that failed, so we began to look more inside. And the things that came from abroad, well, if they're useful to me, I'll use them, if not, I won't.' He summarised the recent transformation: 'it's like you have to take a long roundabout route to get to the starting-point'. Far from viewing the adoption of digital technology by Argentinean musicians as representing progress or a teleological movement towards perfection, Pérez now perceived it as a form of cultural and technological self-colonisation, and saw the subsequent establishment of critical distance as decolonisation. By tying this argument to a critique of Argentina's embrace of neoliberal capitalism in the 1990s, he also suggested a link between post-digitalism and the post-neoliberalism that emerged in response to the 2001 crisis (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009).

Here, then, the post-digital turn is allied to a Latin American roots movement, as middle-class capital-dwellers of primarily European ancestry seek a deeper connection to the continent's cultural traditions and natural world. Fascination with digital technology emerges as a phase rather than an end point, serving as a doorway to discovering national and regional musics. There is a notable ethnomusicological spirit within this scene; several interviewees had travelled extensively to learn in depth about traditional musics and their contexts. Tonolec spent several years researching indigenous music from the northern province of Chaco, learning songs orally while living with indigenous communities. Chancha Via Circuito and Lulacruza went on field trips to the Andes and Colombia, respectively, where they collected and recorded music and ambient sounds. Mati Zundel made a long road trip across Latin America, exploring folkloric music and learning to play traditional instruments. The local post-digital ethos thus encompasses a desire to transcend laptop production and engage in new ways with regional musical technologies and sources that were initially sampled.

El Remolón's 2014 release *Selva* (Jungle) provides a useful case study. He launched this album with an acoustic set – as he told *Cassette Blog*, 'something I

[22] Oral presentation at 'Música y digitalización en Buenos Aires' seminar, Centro Cultural de la Cooperación, 16 April 2013.

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never would have imagined seven years ago when all this began'.[23] What is more, he intended to develop further his use of conventional instruments, for the 'organic' feel they added. His production process was still laptop based, but he hoped eventually to record in a professional studio with top-class musicians, associating maturation and progress with a reduced role for new technologies.

Selva was inspired by a journey to the Peruvian rainforest to take the psychedelic herbal concoction *ayahuasca*, associated with Amazonian shamanic practices from Peru to Colombia. El Remolón explained to Jesús Pacheco:

> The city where I grew up has always had a Eurocentric idea about culture (it's known as Little Europe) and you can see that when you walk around it and in the traits of its inhabitants. Shamanism is a more Latin American solution to the idea of religion, taking elements from Andean cosmogony and a logic that differs from the western culture that we have been raised with.[24]

Numerous middle-class new cumbia/folklore artists in Buenos Aires and Bogotá displayed not just an urge to reconnect to Latin American sources but, in particular, a desire to do so via shamanic rituals involving *ayahuasca*, which epitomised organicism and journeying back to roots (literally as well as imaginatively). A recurring valorisation of the organic underpins multiple facets of this scene and its artists, linking choices in realms including music and narcotics but also broader lifestyle. For example, in 2014 Mati Zundel was living in the countryside, growing food and raising animals. On his travels in Ecuador, he had learnt about local musical rhythms while living on an organic farm, and he identified his musical development as part of a broader lifestyle evolution. Post-digital music making is thus, in a number of cases, one facet of a wider organic or roots movement and an embrace of 'alternative' or hippy subjectivities by a segment of the local middle class. While organicism and localism are transnationally circulating ideologies, in the digital cumbia and folklore scene they articulate with Latin Americanist identifications and critiques of the technology and culture of the Global North, illustrating how the post-digital ethos takes on distinctive contours in Buenos Aires.

Post-digitalism is unquestionably overdetermined in this context. Both Chancha via Circuito and Mati Zundel's musical development was underpinned by broader lifestyle ideologies, yet both had also been strongly impacted by ZZK's restrictions on sampling. Furthermore, in 2014, both cited other pragmatic factors behind their recent musical choices. After a break, Chancha was starting to rehearse with his band again, encouraged by his new label, Crammed Discs, which sought to boost his appeal to the all-important European summer festival circuit. Zundel, meanwhile, had recently received very mixed responses to his performance at a folklore festival in his nearest town, Dolores. He decided that, since he was intending to live in provincial Argentina, he needed to develop a style that would appeal to a wider range of listeners, including traditionalists. Yet the previous year he had pointed to another factor: on a trip through Brazil, he felt the country 'was kind of dangerous [...] so I didn't want to go around with my computer, so I said "I'll take the guitar". And then meeting people in the street made me want to play with lots of different people, so the computer ended up left to one side.'

[23] See http://www.cassetteblog.com/2014/04/el-remolon-selva-exclusivos-cassette/.
[24] See http://noisey.vice.com/es_mx/blog/el-remoln-la-cumbia-digital-y-el-meneo-de-caderas-como-rito-de-paso.

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It is also worth noting that post-digitalism is not a straight trajectory. El Remolón admitted in 2014 that the complexity of organising rehearsals with a group of busy musicians for the launch of *Selva* had led to a change of heart. He was planning to return to solo performance and a more digital sound, unless he was booked by a promoter with a large budget, in which case he could pay band members enough that he could insist on a strict rehearsal schedule. Chancha via Circuito, meanwhile, surrounds himself in his studio with folkloric and acoustic instruments, since he believes that 'a person can get sick from spending too much time inside the computer', yet his music is mixed and mastered entirely digitally: 'A lot of musicians I know tell me, "Oh no, why don't you work with analog?" Well, it's a lot more expensive and I don't know anybody who knows how to really use the analog stuff' (Clayton 2014). Chancha's post-digitalism is expressed as a desire for a good balance between digital and organic.

These artists illustrate the 'both/and' aspect of post-digitalism. They have developed both digital and acoustic incarnations, solo and band formats, allowing them to adjust to the economic and logistical possibilities of each performance. Both solo/digital and band/acoustic formats have advantages and disadvantages: the former, when it first emerged, presented a solution to the logistical and often interpersonal difficulties of group work; the latter subsequently offered a resolution to the limited interactivity and visual appeal of the former. The answer, concluded El Remolón, is to be able to do both. We find cycles, then, rather than a straight line leading away from digitalism, as artists move back and forth in search of a post-digital balance.

The post-digital divide

Bringing *música turra* back into the picture, recent developments in Buenos Aires may be conceptualised as a shift from a digital divide to a post-digital divide, one that may usefully be analysed through a Bourdieusian lens of taste and distinction (Bourdieu 1984). When future ZZK artists had started making digital cumbia, it had been primarily an upper-middle-class pursuit, but by 2012 digital cumbia had taken hold among the popular classes. Now, all but the very poorest inhabitants of Buenos Aires had access to digital technology – a digital inclusion symbolised by the emergence of *música turra*. Meanwhile, middle-class *cumbieros* were increasingly accumulating various kinds of 'analogue' symbolic capital, whether objects, knowledge or skills. Whereas, a decade earlier, middle-class cumbia had been distinguished by its embrace of the digital, now its difference was apparent in the choice to use (often more expensive) non-digital resources and shun the convenience and short cuts provided by digital tools. As the digital became the new normal, a post-digital divide emerged.[25]

If making digital cumbia had once been a relatively specialised activity, now looping up a cumbia sample and putting it to a beat was easy and commonplace; indeed, YouTube tutorials showed how to make a digital cumbia track in a few minutes. A major impact of digital technology has been reducing the cost and complexity of equipment and procedures, but middle-class musicians repeatedly expressed

[25] This term was used by John Hagel, Suketu Gandhi and Giovanni Rodriguez in their post 'The empowered employee is coming; is the world ready?', originally published by *Forbes*, 9 February 2012. See http://thesociallarder.com/?p=1084.

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anxiety over the resultant ease of making functional digital fusions and remixes. Many responded by reintroducing complexity and imperfection, and making processes more costly in terms of time, effort or money: acquiring expensive analogue technology and rare vinyls; learning to play acoustic instruments; or opting for artisanal processes in music production. They increasingly displayed a collector's or researcher's ethos rather than a downloader's or sampler's. Chancha via Circuito developed his unique sound through spending innumerable hours constructing his own sound bank, rather than simply borrowing from existing ones. Leo Martinelli took a manual approach to music production, choosing complex, time-consuming processes over pre-sets and short cuts. Such approaches exemplify the slow, systematic acquisition, shunning of practicality, and embracing of difficulty and expense that are, for Bourdieu, characteristic of symbolic capital and markers of social distinction.

Ian Andrews identified a rejection of post-modern aesthetics and practices in post-digital computer music, and something similar can be observed in the change in middle-class approaches to cumbia. Appropriations of cumbia by middle-class musicians since the 1980s have often been underpinned by a kitsch sensibility (Guerra n.d.; see also Madrid 2008). A foundational moment for digital cumbia was the surreal Festicumex (Festival of Experimental Cumbia), produced in 2003 by the Dutch conceptual artist and musical prankster Dick el Demasiado. But the rise of middle-class cumbia orchestras from 2009 displays a different character; the tongue is no longer in cheek, and a new purism and seriousness are in evidence. Musicians underlined the amount of time and effort they had put into researching Colombian cumbia and Andean music, whether through travelling or old recordings. ZZK's artists, too, increasingly took researching traditional music seriously, and there was little sign of the ironic cumbia covers or remixes of earlier periods. This new reverence for sources contrasts with *música turra*, which took on a distinctly post-modern hue with its collage-like textures, juxtaposing cumbia with techno, and its parodic video remixes.

The diverging paths of digital and post-digital cumbia were illustrated by the emergence of a cumbia promotion programme called Cultura Cumbia from the University of La Plata. Cultura Cumbia emphasises the genre's origins as folklore and its subsequent development into localised variations across Latin America.[26] In 2014, Cultura Cumbia organised cycles of concerts at Tecnópolis and on a sidestage sponsored by the Ministry of Culture at the Cosquín Folklore Festival. The latter displayed a sign describing cumbia as 'Folklore of Latin America'. According to a note in the festival newspaper *El Diario del Festival* on 27 January, Cultura Cumbia showed 'the ancestral trajectory of our history', drawing on 'the knowledge of the people and the earth'.[27] Cultura Cumbia encapsulates an emerging middle-class conception of cumbia as pan-Latin folklore or roots music, rather than mass-mediated and technologically advanced popular music.

Cultura Cumbia's activities revealed that cumbia had been accepted as a worthy representative of Latin American music by the Ministry of Culture, and the genre's presence at the country's most emblematic folklore festival was another step towards its legitimation. Yet it was notable that the festival's cumbia highlight

[26] See http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201407/72758-tecnopolis-cumbia.html.
[27] Jane Florine (pers. commun.).

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was the leading middle-class, traditionalist orchestra, La Delio Valdez. The thinking behind Cultura Cumbia's programming was spelled out in a newspaper article on Cosquín (Sánchez 2014b), which underlined that there were different varieties of cumbia, and not all were welcome: 'It is commonplace to put it all in the same basket and confuse the authentic with the commercial. Lucho Bermúdez, Celso Piña, Juan Carlos Denis or Andrés Landero have nothing to do with Los Wachiturros, Las Culisueltas or other ephemeral projects created by a producer.' Cumbia was thus officially recognised as valued national culture – but only in its traditionalist and predominantly middle-class incarnation. 'Ephemeral projects' like Los Wachiturros, produced on computers and performed by working-class youths, remained outside the tent.

This article points to interesting inversions that were taking place within the cumbia sphere with regard to authenticity discourses, a good place to look for symbolic capital. There was a shift in middle-class attitudes to cumbia, from rejection to claiming authenticity by going back to Colombian or Andean sources. Artists' legitimacy was thus guaranteed not by class position but by research and knowledge. Meanwhile, Los Wachiturros became simultaneously the most talked about and the most derided group in Argentinean cumbia, with online commentary revealing social, cultural and racial prejudices. So, whereas middle-class cumbia initiatives had once been criticised as inauthentic, now it was precisely the new current in working-class cumbia that was dismissed, for doing almost exactly the same thing – making digital cumbia on a laptop – that ZZK's upper-middle-class producers had been doing for the previous five years to international acclaim. In 2007–2008, fashionable North American DJs like Diplo and Rupture travelled to Buenos Aires to imbibe ZZK's digital cumbia; in 2011–2012, many Argentineans held up Los Wachiturros's digital cumbia as the epitome of cultural trash. The redefinition and legitimation of cumbia as pan-Latin roots music saw digital technology cast as a marker of inauthenticity, leaving *música turra* on the opposite side of a post-digital divide.

So, while the growing acceptance of cumbia among the middle class was read as evidence of a certain Latin Americanisation or 'popularisation' of this class, when *música turra* is brought into the picture, the apparent narrowing of sociocultural divisions within Argentinean society takes on a slightly different hue. Cristian del Negro, one of ZZK's core figures, said that the label's founding dream had been to bring together the worlds of cumbia and EDM, and thus overcome class divisions between the popular and elite sectors, but he interpreted the emergence of *música turra* five years later, with no reference to or awareness of its middle-class antecedents, as evidence that the dream had failed. The reinvention of digital cumbia (*música turra*) in 2011 and the simultaneous middle-class shift towards pre- and post-digital cumbia point, rather, to the reproduction of class distinctions via a bifurcation of tastes in cumbia along the technological and aesthetic lines of the post-digital divide.

The state (again)

Recent cumbia developments are underpinned by state policies in both technological and cultural spheres. Nevertheless, there are contradictions between these two branches. Let us return to Tecnópolis, the flagship state project to promote social inclusion around the theme of science and technology. It is 'an event for the masses

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that has been seized by the Argentinean people as a space for meeting and celebration', we may recall. *Música turra* – high tech and widely consumed – would seem a logical musical accompaniment, yet it is notable by its absence. In reality, the soundtrack to this 'event for the masses' is not the music of the masses. Of the three strands of cumbia identified above, it is the two alternative or post-digital ones that have been invited, represented by groups like La Delio Valdez, Orkesta San Bomba, Chancha via Circuito, Tremor, La Yegros and Paloma del Cerro. Cultura Cumbia has a significant presence at Tecnópolis, putting on a cycle of 16 concerts in July–August 2014; its programme was dominated by bands from the middle-class cumbia scene. The perplexing choice of an orchestra that plays 1950s Colombian covers to musicalise a nationalist, high-tech institution reveals that the dominant sectors' long-standing unease about cumbia and class continues to be manifested at the level of music programming. A few years earlier, cumbia was still largely excluded by institutions (Luker 2010). At Tecnópolis, as at Cosquín, a shift in official attitudes has occurred; now cumbia is included, but only if it conforms to a middle-class conception of the genre as folkloric or roots music.

Similarly, the agenda of the government programme Igualdad Cultural in 2012 included middle-class fusion favourites such as Gustavo Santaolalla, Miss Bolivia, La Bomba de Tiempo and Morbo y Mambo, but again there was no sign of the music of the masses. Six years on from Morgan Luker's (2010) fieldwork on music policy in Buenos Aires, working-class cumbia continued to serve as the limit of diversity discourses and cultural subsidy, and his conclusion that the state was 'deeply invested in maintaining a coherent (if contested) division between "proper" and "improper" modes of citizenship' (Luker, 2010, p. 106) remained true, although the location of the dividing line had changed from *around* cumbia to *within* it: no longer passing between rock and cumbia, but rather between traditionalist cumbia and *música turra*. Music programming at Tecnópolis and Igualdad Cultural illustrates how the state, while actively addressing the digital divide, also bolsters the post-digital divide by excluding the cultural fruits of its own policies to promote digital inclusion. Recent movements in cumbia suggest that the state's focus on expanding technological access and use may not straightforwardly disrupt the reproduction of social distinctions.

Conclusion

I have argued that certain recent changes in the Buenos Aires cumbia scene may usefully be identified and analysed as manifestations of a post-digital ethos. The usefulness of this term derives from its capacity to highlight and connect a range of developments, in musical and non-musical realms, as critical responses to digital conditions. Post-digitalism is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that should not be equated to simple nostalgia or analogue fetishism. While it overlaps with retro or vintage fashions, it also extends into many areas of importance to musicians, such as economics, research, personal and artistic development, and sociability. The emergence of post-digitalism suggests that Berland's (2008) anxieties over 'postmusics' are excessive, as it valorises precisely the aspects of music making – non-digital instruments, human collaboration – that she sees as disappearing.

Post-digitalism is a transnational phenomenon, yet Buenos Aires evidences a distinctive form, inflected by local history and articulated to growing regionalism

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and, more obliquely, post-neoliberalism. While post-digitalism has class connotations transnationally (for example, in its association with the figure of the hipster), in Buenos Aires this aspect has become particularly salient through attachment to cumbia, a musical style itself long at the centre of class distinctions. The post-digital divide and the class politics of cumbia make for a potent combination. If there has been a recent drawing-together of social classes around cumbia, one can also observe the reproduction of class distinctions through intra-genre differentiation via technology and aesthetics, a process that the state bolsters through cultural programming.

To cast our minds back to the start, it would have been inconceivable for Nena Mala to play at Tecnópolis instead of Chancha via Circuito, because the group's technological and aesthetic alignment is beyond the pale for the cultural establishment. A reverse changing of places is equally hard to imagine: as the legendary cumbia musician Pablo Lescano noted of ZZK's artists, 'if these same deejays went to *bailanta* [the working-class dance hall], on the third track, get them offstage, because they will throw bottles at them' (Alarcón 2013, p. 215). Class distinctions run deep, and are not displaced simply by a shared love of cumbia.

This picture from Buenos Aires fleshes out but also contrasts with recent accounts from Peru and Colombia. Tucker (2013, pp. 163–5) briefly describes a recent uptake of older, 'classic' varieties of cumbia by Lima's elites, but one focused on consumption rather than production, while Fernández L'Hoeste's (2013, pp. 262–7) account of the crossover of cumbia to the Colombian and international mainstream reveals not a roots movement or purification process but a merging with pop music (resulting in *tropipop*). Findings from Buenos Aires contribute to the debate about the extent to which cumbia now represents a site of cross-class identification and encounter, suggesting that Tucker's caution may be more justified than his optimism. They also show both parallels and contrasts with the earlier assimilation of lower class musics by the middle and upper classes in Latin America, for example in Cuba in the 1920s and 1930s (Moore 1997). If both periods saw heightened nationalism and resistance to the USA, the nationalisation of Afro-Cuban music generally entailed modernising or Europeanising it. In Buenos Aires today, however, middle-class cumbia is increasingly stripping away modern characteristics and returning to an imagined Latin American purity of earlier decades.

Post-digitalism has its critics. Monroe (2003) identifies it as a retreat from the radical promise of digitalism and 'a political as well as aesthetic appeasement of the current order' (Monroe, 2003, p. 41). Similarly, Adam Harper's (2014) advocacy for accelerationism (a kind of contemporary Futurism) rests on his assertion that 'wealthy white men strumming wistfully on guitars or twiddling analogue gear and evoking hazy halcyon days is not just complacent, ignorant, and privileged but downright offensive in a world of financial crisis, military robots, the surge of the far right, NSA surveillance, and continual severe storm warnings'. However, despite the return to older, more familiar formats and practices, post-digital musicians in Buenos Aires are engaged in processes that are rather more complex and profound than wistful strumming and twiddling: their technological explorations form part of a broader movement of reconnecting to the history and culture of their continent, often involving significant personal investment in the form of fieldwork and/or lifestyle changes. Their critical attitudes towards, but also sophisticated engagements with, new technologies suggest that their shifts might be seen – *pace* Monroe – as progression, as they explore an important question posed by digital ubiquity: 'what happens next?'

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