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GLOBAL POSTMODERNITY, WORLD MUSIC AND THE DISCOURSE OF AUTHENTICITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE *BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB*

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Abstract

This essay examines the discursive construct of key members of the Buena Vista Social Club CD and documentary. Using the literature of transnational cultural studies, the essays suggests that “authenticity” is a key marker of the mobilization of World Music as a sonic text—and the Buena Vista Social Club an exemplar of this process.

Keywords: World Music, Authenticity, Buena Vista Social Club.

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Introduction

In this essay,¹ I engage with the complex set of sonic connections that goes by the label, “World Music.” The next section on “Framing World Music/The Global Postmodern/Authenticity” outlines some key elements in how World Music can be theoretically framed—as a specific kind of text, anchored in conditions of global postmodernity and characterized by a defining discourse—that of “authenticity.” This is

followed by a biographical/textual accounting of an iconic World Music text, *the Buena Vista Social Club* (the music and documentary) and its leading star, Ibrahim Ferrer, with a focus on examining how his biographical/textual imprint illustrates the different ways in which the discourse of “authenticity” is mobilized in World Music/the global postmodern. Finally, the concluding section offers some broad research questions about the global postmodern/ authenticity to be examined in future studies.

¹ This essay draws on material published earlier as part of a book length project on international

communication theory and communicative practice (Kavoori, 2009).

Framing The Global Postmodern/ World Music / Authenticity:

Aubert (2007) offers a beginning point for understanding music as something central to meaning making in a culture, rather than mere “fluff”—light entertainment for the illiterate and the bored:

If music has its own place in all reflections on culture, it does so by the stakes it represents. Music is indeed never insignificant. It is simultaneously a strong and unifying means of communication and a revealer of identity within the abundance of models that characterize society. We identify ourselves with music we like because it corresponds to our sensibility and vision of the world; we draw apart from other music when it is our foreign to our affinities and fails to “speak” to us. Through its content music is always a bearer of meanings (Aubert, 2007, p. 1).

He adds that “if Plato could write that ‘the music and literature of a country cannot be altered without major political and social changes’ that is because the music he was referring to was at the same time the echo and

model of something other than itself” (Aubert, 2007, p. 1). What is that something else that music refers to? I would like to suggest that the “something else” that one kind of music—World Music—refers to is a sociological condition that goes by the name of “Global Postmodernity.”

The Global Postmodern: There are two primary ways in which World Music reflects the idea of the global postmodern—the first is the idea of music as a *structuration of global space* into the constitutive elements that go by terms such as local, national, regional, glocal and so forth. World Music, like all music “does not then simply provide a marker in prestructured social space, but the means by which this can space can be transformed [...] music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them” (Stokes, 1994, 4-5). Secondly, World Music acts as a *marker of identity* in the global structuration of space. Identity and its imbrication in power relations is a defining element of postmodernism—and is usually referred to by putting the two ideas together in the term “Identity Politics” (where ones identity is more a product of social circumstance than individual will). Music, like other media forms, is a key element in how identity politics is mobilized in a culture. Discussing identity politics and gender, Stokes (1994) suggests that music is a key element in how boundaries

which separate male and female are naturalized: “It is as natural that men will make better trumpeters than women as it is natural that women make better harpists. Musical performance is often the principal means by which appropriate gender behavior is taught and socialized” (p. 22).

Combing the two elements (global structuration of space and identity politics), Erlmann (1996) suggests, “World Music is a new aesthetic form of the global imagination, an emergent way of capturing the present historical moment and the total reconfiguration of space and cultural identity characterizing societies around the globe” (p. 468). Taking up Erlmann’s (1996) proposal that “an aesthetic theory of music in the global age [...] should examine the ways in which world music constructs the experience of global communication [...] through symbolic means” (p. 481) and Jensen’s (2002) idea of music criticism “as a form of cultural and social criticism [...] where talking and thinking about music, is a way of talking and thinking about (global) modernity” (p. 195), I would like to offer the following (working) definition of Global Postmodernism as a guiding principle in the discussion of global music to follow:

Simply put, *global postmodernism is the discursive centering—and movement—of identity politics on a global scale.*² This centering/movement/force can be *observed* across a range of institutional practices, forms and resistances (of which mass media is one—albeit critical—institutional site and Global Music one set of media practices); *interrogated* at different points in social/spatial organization (for example, local, regional, national and transnational); made *manifest* around common forms of identity mobilization (race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and language) and *articulated* through a relatively stable set of mass-mediated binaries such as traditional/modern, authentic/mass-marketed; exotic/familiar; non-western/western, tribal/urban, folk/cosmopolitan.

Drawn with such broad strokes, the global postmodern can be used as an analytical category to examine a range of media forms and practices (not just World Music). It is outside the scope of this essay to fully develop the theoretical implications of this definition (across all its constitutive elements) or even its full application on World Music. Rather, the goals here are very limited—to provide a *descriptive account* of “authenticity” which I will suggest is the defining discourse of World

² It needs to be emphasized that that Identity Politics is not the only textual / narrative / discursive practice that works through the work of the global postmodern. Concerns of hybridity, liminality and agency are often equally valuable. For purposes of

the illustrating the preminent role of authenticity as a discourse, I am focusing on Identity Politics. I want to thank the anonymous reviewer of this paper in pointing this out.

Music. I will map out how “authenticity” is mobilized across these different performers in four *specific* contexts—those of gender, age, ethnicity and religion.

World Music: What is “World Music?” Some like Bohlman (2002) argue that there is “ample justification to call just about anything World Music” (p. xi). Minimally, it can be argued that World Music is a category generated in the industrialized music markets of the developed world. In the introduction to *World Music: The Rough Guide* the editors outline that

the name was dreamed up in 1987 by the heads of a number of small London-based record labels who found their releases from African, Latin American and other international stars were not finding rack space because record stores had no obvious place to put them. And so the World Music tag was hit upon, initially as a month-long marketing campaign to impress on the music shops, the critics and the buyers that there were sounds worth listening to. The name stuck, however, and was swiftly adopted at record stores and festivals, in magazines and books, on both sides of the

Atlantic (Broughton, Ellingham & Trillo, 1999, p. i).

There are some key issues that emerge for international musicians when working under the label “World Music.” Their music must be seen as “exotic, different, fresh [...] and (they are) categorized by their ethnicity rather than music” (Taylor, 1977, p. 17). Discursively, too it can be argued that the music reiterates “old sensibilities about Others and their cultures. Several common strands emerge: rejuvenation, novelty, authenticity, originality, the ‘real’ and the spiritual” (p. 19).

Authenticity: Taylor (1977) suggests that “authenticity” in World Music usually refers to two things a:

“cultural-ethnographic accuracy” (where the music speaks from a specific cultural/local/national space) and his/her identity politics—what he calls the singers “positionality” as a racialized, ethnicized, subaltern and premodern subject. Both these elements are combined with a psychosocial vision of personal performance where “sincerity or fidelity to a true self” and “credibility, sincerity and a commitment to one’s art” are fused” (p. 21).

He goes on to add that such a model of authenticity is shot through with issues of unequal discursive power and intent:

These authenticities have at bottom an assumption about an essentialized, real, actual essence. The West, while it views its citizens as occupying many different subject positions, allows “natives” only one, and its whatever the West wants at any particular moment. So constructions of natives by music fans at the metropolises constantly demand that these natives be premodern, untainted, and thus musically the same as they ever were (Taylor, 1977, p. 21).

Listeners of world music, he concludes “consume some discernable connection to the timeless, the ancient, the primal, the pure, the chthonic; that is what they want to buy; since their own world is open seen as ephemeral, new, artificial and corrupt” (Taylor, 1977, p. 26).

Is the authenticity in World Music then merely a market tactic, a product of finding shelf space in Western music stores? In this essay, I suggest that an understanding of authenticity in World Music must engage with the specific narrative trajectories that individual artists bring into play as they deploy

ideas about the authentic— even as they intersect with the needs of western audiences. My goals are primarily descriptive—to track the authentic as a *beginning* point in a theory of World Music focused on issues of subalternity rather than appropriation or cultural hybridity (the focus of much of World Music research)—but a topic that I address briefly in the conclusion.

Buena Vista Social Club/ Ibrahim Ferrer: **Locality, Age and Authenticity**

An important landmark in the development of World Music came with the hugely successful album of Cuban music *Buena Vista Social Club* and specifically in the identity construct of its most well known performer, Ibrahim Ferrer. I will turn to a general discussion of this album followed by a detailed discussion of Ferrer and some of the songs in the album, suggesting that the album articulates issues of authenticity through a mobilization of “old age” as a text of global postmodernity along with deeply felt nostalgia for a “lost” locality—Cuba before Castro.

The *Buena Vista Social Club* album is an evocative, transformative listening experience—it has the balance, nuance and verisimilitude of something simultaneously granular and polished. Much like listening to Cesaria Evora, you don’t have to know the

language or know that the songs in this album are fully realized, the work of a life-time of immersion in music and a full complement of the vicissitudes of life, both personal and sociological. The album was the brainchild of Ry Cooder, the well-known American musician and Nick Gold his producer. They were in Cuba working on a different project that fell through. At the last minute they decided to produce an album of older, traditional Cuban folk music. Musicians long retired and mostly forgotten were contacted at short notice—some like Ibrahim Ferrer were literally taken from the street during his daily walk. Ferrer would later say, “An angel came and picked me up and said, ‘Chico, come and do this record. I didn’t want to do it, because I had given up on music.’” They managed to put together “a galaxy of some of Havana’s most experienced exponents of *son* (the predominant musical force in traditional Cuban song and dance and the root of *salsa*) *guajira* (a Spanish-derived, slow, acoustic form associated with Cuban farmers) and *bolero* (one of the most European styles of traditional Cuban music)” (Williamson, 1997, p. 83).

The album was recorded in the old RCA victor studio in Havana (built in the 1940’s before the trade embargo/blockade that followed the 1959 revolution). The likes of Nat King Cole and Cab Calloway recorded there. “It’s the best studio I have been in,” said Cooder. “Its big, but it’s a very sensitive

room” (Williamson, 1997, p. 83). In this sensitive room were assembled 89 year old guitarist, Compay Segundo; 77 year old pianist Rueben Gonzalez; the 56 year old Eliades Ochoa and above all, the 73 year old vocalist Ibrahim Ferrer. The songs were packaged as the *Buena Vista Social Club*, named for a former hotel in Havana. The album was a hit, selling several million copies worldwide, leading to a documentary by the well-known director, Wim Wenders (it was nominated for an Oscar). In the years to come, the album sparked a revival in Cuban music, and solo discs by most of the major players (Nickson, 2007; Gonzalez, 2003; Moon, 1999).

What explains the albums success? I will suggest that there are two interrelated elements around authenticity, old age and locality that worked to create the impact it made on the world music scene. These elements were the cultural/historical construct of all the singers and the Iconography of Ibrahim Ferrer.

The cultural/historical construct of the singers: Simply put, the age and “voice” of the singers on the album became a stand-in for history itself. Writing in *Jazzis*, Holston (2000) suggested that the sound’s segmented history was part of its appeal:

The Buena Vista’s elder musicians represent a virtual history of Cuban musical styles.

For most, the son's classic afro-Cuban idiom is the stylistic reference point originating in the orient (eastern) region of Cuba, the son's basic tres (Cuban guitar), guitar, and maracas traveled to Havana, then gradually took on more of an African flavor with the addition of bongos. Later, the incorporation of bass, claves, and two trumpets began to point the way to the salsa, bongo and timba of today (Holston, 2000, p. 53).

From an industry perspective, the success of the album lay in the audience which was ready for a new sound. As David Bither, a senior VP at Nonesuch records put it,

these are infectious records, and there has been increasing evidence in the last ten years that there is an audience for music from different parts of the world. There is growing enthusiasm amongst a variety of musical communities for this type of music. The fact that the record has been produced and features Ry Cooder gives American audiences a doorway into this music who might not otherwise

be familiar with the great richness of music and some of the remarkable musicians who have been living and working in Cuba for the past half century (Williamson, 1997, p. 10).

On a similar note, Raul Fernandez, who worked on the Smithsonian Institute's Oral History project, suggested that

the Cuban son is very powerful. The appeal (of the album) has much to do with the audiences tiring of the heavily electronic, stylistic simple music that's being produced for the global market. (In contrast) Buena Vista synthesizes centuries of history and musical fusion. It's not just an aural peanut-butter-and jelly sandwich (Moon, 1999, p. 29).

Finally, The singers and the album were marketed as evocative of a specific time and place, as was the documentary that followed it. As the website for the music/documentary puts it:

Havana, Cuba, circa 1949: A dance club resplendent with the elegance of the island's nightlife before the Revolution. Sparkling chandeliers, bow-tied waiters, couples dressed to

the nines. On stage, a big, brassy band fronted by a slick-haired heart-throb. There is the kind of gaiety in the air that can only brew in the company of young people and everyone here is young. There is drinking and dancing and flirting. The ambience is a curious mix of abandon and formality. When a young man asks a young woman to dance, the gesture is rendered with great respect and formality; the young man gently extends an upturned hand. But on the dance floor, things are considerably looser. The rhythms echoing in the hall play the bodies like marionettes, a ritual unleashing of desire. And yet, for all the seemingly spontaneous force of the music and dancing, there are clearly defined patterns. The bodies pace and twirl to the music's 6/8 rhythm, and even more specifically, to five accented beats within that signature, what is known as the clave, the root of tropical music. There is plenty of room for improvisation among both musicians and dancers, but the limits are known to all. It is exuberant, even "dangerous" music, kind of tropical rock 'n' roll where the sexuality is barely, if at all, contained (Martinez, 1999)

Both the specificities of the historical moment the album was evoking and the singers—became part of the mythology/marketing of the album. Cuba's history—and its complex, troubled relationship with America—was part of the narrative of the album. The question of whether the old musicians still had it became tied to whether Cuba's past (before the 1959 revolution) could be recovered. The liner-notes on the album/documentary oriented listeners/viewers to how this moment could be narratively constructed:

Just about everyone involved in the project remembers the moment that Rubén González showed up at Egrem for an "audition." Nick Gold, Juan de Marcos González and Ry Cooder watched from the control room as the diminutive, plaintive-faced González sat at the piano in the booth. The lights were dimmed. González caressed the keys, executing a tumbao progression. Without prompting, Orlando "Cachaito" López joined in on bass. After several minutes, the lights came up; González took it as a bad sign. "I thought they wanted me to stop playing," he recalled. Just the opposite: everyone in the control booth was

keenly aware that the master still had “it.” And so it was with the rest of the cast (Martinez, 1999).

This self-reflexive engagement with musical history and history making was a central part of the album’s appeal. Once again the liner notes puts this square and center:

If you'd been at the Buena Vista Social Club in Havana, circa 1949, history itself would have danced before your eyes. And it does so once again, through the music and the film. We return to the proscribed Island, a place that was rendered at once mythic and hopelessly superficial through the lens of the Cold War. We also return to a past that was virtually proscribed in Cuba itself (Martinez, 1999).

For critics of the album/documentary, the last statement “a past that was virtually proscribed in Cuba” speaks to the album’s placement within a specific political narrative that has dominated American perceptions of Cuba—one of death, or stagnation—in Cuba after the 1959 revolution. As the island became closed to Americans, it also became a site for a relatively stable set of discourses around identity that drew on the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crises and the construct of

Castro as a dictator. They pointed out that the music seems to be outside of history—that what happened after 1959 did not matter—

“not a word about the blockade of Cuba, not a word about the fact that all the musical and cultural roots together with the old repertoire were jealously kept by the people, not a word about the other kinds of music that, in claiming to draw their inspiration from the old rhythms, use the instruments and means that musical training after the revolution made available to them. Modernism, a key word amongst young Cubans, is not mentioned at any time in the film, while any member of the younger generation could have explained what they owe musically to the tradition and what they were breaking away from” (Roy, 2002, pp. 194-195).

The Iconography of Ibrahim Ferrer: The construct of Ibrahim Ferrer as a singer and a media text was central to the phenomena that became the *Buena Vista Social Club*. Part of his importance lay in the narrative trajectory of his life. Ibrahim Ferrer was born on February 20, 1927, when his mother went into labor during a dance in the Cuban village of San

Luis. By 12, Ferrer was an orphan, surviving by selling newspapers and produce on the street. He began his singing career at 14 and was part of numerous bands and groups including Pancho Alonso, with whom he sang on and off for three decades proving himself a masters of the energetic, up-tempo *guarachas* and *sones* but also a sublime bolero singer with an uncommon sense of space and silence. He retired from active singing in 1991, living off a state pension and making money on the side shining shoes and selling lottery tickets. When approached for the album, he refused the invitation, but eventually relented, grumbling that he did not even “have time to take a shower.” The rest as they say is history. As Gonzalez puts it,

of the accompanying tales that contributed to the Buena Vista Social Club's success, the story of Ibrahim Ferrer was a particularly compelling one. Here was a retired, forgotten, never-quite-a-star singer called for a small walk-on part and ending up on eight of the fourteen tracks on Buena Vista, five as a lead vocal, leading to his first album as a leader and international star status (Gonzalez, 2003).

Ferrer emerged as the star in the documentary shot by Wenders who accompanied Cooder back on his next trip to Cuba, followed by the success of his two solo albums *Buena Vista Presents Ibrahim Ferrer* and *Buenos Hermanos* which featured Cooder, trumpeter Jon Hassell and the gospel group, the Blind Boys of Alabama. Critics suggested that Ferrer's album offered an informal history of classic Cuban singing from lovelorn romantic ballads, to stately, slithering dance numbers built on the *son* rhythm and Cooder in interviews emphasized that “Cuban music is a vocal music. If you don't sing it right, it doesn't happen. Ibrahim is one of the few who understand how to sing it. He possess the great sad top end of the voice that you need” (Moon, 1999, p. 40).

At the heart of Ferrer's appeal was his voice, a strange indefinable entity, both subtle and powerful. As Gonzalez (2003) put it,

“Ferrer has a peculiar voice—a light worn out tenor, not particularly rich, powerful or commanding. In spite of it, perhaps precisely because of it, Ferrer still sounds tailor-made to convey loss and heartbreak. And whatever is lacking in his instrument, Ferrer more than makes up with his instincts, knowledge and guile. Cooder sets up compact, unsentimental

grooves and Ferrer, as good singers do, phrases as if skating over them, creating tension by laying back then rushing” (p. 71).

The iconic image on the album cover that the listeners is centrally oriented to is that of Ferrer, walking on the streets of Havana. This is an image that provides the foundational narrative of the album. It is at the heart, an image about locality. Arrayed on one side of the street are old American cars (the Studebakers) that are a staple of American iconography as it relates to Cuba, a residual of both history and continual estrangement. The cars and Ferrer are arranged on either side of the street and work together to create a segmented construct—a rendition of history, that it turns out is not lost, but is recoverable—and in fact has been recovered in the songs and image of Ibrahim Ferrer.

The songs that Ibrahim sings in the documentary extend and segment the iconic image on the album cover. I immersed myself in repeated viewing of the songs/documentary and came up with four recurrent elements: The use of the urban landscape of Santiago; the placement of local people within that landscape; the use of cars as a key referent and finally, the use of the natural environment. Each element had a specific thematic orientation—the urban landscape focused on was the decaying, sepia toned buildings of Old

Santiago on which are found faded posters of the revolution—Che Guvera, most noticeably; the people that live in these old buildings are shown as extensions of the buildings—a woman, smoking a large cigar, men huddled around a broken down Studebaker, shopkeepers, children looking quizzically at the camera. The old, colorful Studebakers are a central recurring leitmotif of the documentary—they are stars in their own right—and punctuate the narrative of the entire documentary appearing as both bookends to songs, and as ghosts of the living past. The car’s work as segmented metaphors for both history and indigenous experience—they are splashed by the sea as it crashes on the embankment; they grace the covers of albums and photo’s that stitch together different parts of the documentary. The cars even appear as part of the natural environment, lying under green, dirty and drooping trees, crowded under the decaying natural landscape. Ibrahim Ferrer appears as a construct across these visual images, drawing sustenance from them but equally crucially *framing* the landscape. The documentary is not a critique of Cuba but a love-letter to a place frozen in time and Ferrer *becomes that moment*. As *The New York Times* wrote in his obituary,

besides offering American audiences a musician’s-eye view of Cuba, the film set up Mr. Ferrer as a particularly

*sympathetic figure-tall,
distinguished and lively, an
excellent bolero singer who used
space and silence in his relaxed
elegant delivery to increase the
drama, a man who had been
rolled over by history and was
now simply trying to enjoy an
absurdly lucky situation (Ratliff,
2005).*

The songs with their themes of love, redemption, personal life and fate are tied in to the visual metonymies of the documentary. The words of some of the songs illustrate this:

De Camin a La Verada (composed and sung by Ibrahim Ferrer)

*Listen friend, don't stray from the path
Just because you are in love
You, so old and jaded
You, so old and faded
You have become all flustered
Because of the lady by your side
Listen friend, don't stray from the path*

El Curato De Tula (composed by Sergio Siaba, sung by Ibrahim Ferrer)

*There's a real commotion going on in
Cachimba
The firemen have arrived with bells ringing
and sirens blaring
Oh mama, what happened?
Its Tula's bedroom, it's gone up in flames*

*She fell asleep and did not blow out the candle
Call Ibrahim Ferrer, call the fire brigade
I think Tula wants them to put out her fire
Oh, here comes Eliades amid the commotion
He has come to see Tula's bedroom in flames*

Dos Gardenias (composed by Isolina Carillo sung by Ibrahim Ferrer)

*Two gardenias for you
With these I mean to say
I love, I adore you, my life
Look after them because*

They are your heart and mine (All lyrics are taken from the printed material in the CD Buena Vista Social Club).

Each song is located within a historical tradition. The first, is in the tradition of a religious hymn; the second, a example of a *descarga* (Cuban jam style) and the third, a *bolero*. The first song represents an interesting collapse of the secular and the religious—working through the expected progression of the vicissitudes of love, through a call for a religious intervention/encounter. The second song is wonderfully inventive, evoking both locality and personal wit, coupled with a generous dose of sexual innuendo. Its self-referentiality (with the actions of Ferrer and Eliade as actors within the narrative of the song) is also a sign of its authenticity, signaling the listener to both the pleasure of its immediate construction (the improvisation of the lyrics) and to the source of such

improvisation—the presence of these old men, and their obvious ineptitude in such matters. As Eliades Ochoa, says in an interview about the album, “there is a saying in my country. The soup from an old hen is better than from a young one. Also rum and urine—better with age. And that’s what’s happening to our music” (Holston, 2000, p. 54). Finally, the *bolero* needs little introduction. Is a bottomless treasure in the search for the authentic. Discussing Ferrer’s rendition of the *bolero*, Cooder suggests that “the *bolero* conveys both the innocence of another time and a true musical sophistication. It doesn’t mean anything if you can’t sing it for real, with a certain depth and beauty that has to be heard to be believed. Ibrahim is one of those great voices” (Cantor, 1999, p. 12).

I would like to suggest that each of these songs (and the others on the album) work to create, a consistency of discursive intent, around issues of authenticity mediated by a fullness of presence (of both song and the singer, Ferrer) and a sense of pleasure, both as personal expression and as part of a global humanism. This latter expression of the (presumed) unity of creative intent is central to the authenticity that World Music inculcates. As the liner notes for the album/documentary put it,

Through this story, then, we return to the Island, one that we really all inhabit: The island of

history, with all its twists and turns, its ironies and cruelties. This is the story of a dozen or so musicians that were trapped by history but who were also ultimately granted a reprieve, very late in their lives, from it (Martínez, 1999).

World Music, works through texts like Ferrer to recover history, to reach out to a space of cultural and national authenticity, creating both a market for such music and for a certain narrative about history itself.

In sum, the album lends itself to analysis along the lines of the excavation of a native authenticity, marked through a shrewd rendition of a certain topos—the streetscape of Santiago with its iconic cover—with the textual imprint of Ferrer (as a stand in for history) walking in his trademark golf hat, between the shade and the light, between modernity and tradition, lending both voice and figurative presence to the re-birth of pre-revolutionary musical form under the nose of the communist state.

My goal in this essay has been primarily descriptive, focusing on a mapping out one regional context that make up the

narrative of “authenticity” in World Music. While limited in scope, the Cuban case points to at least three interrelated generalizations about authenticity—as steps to a broader subaltern theory of the global postmodern—and which can be tested and examined in other cultural contexts.

First, the “authentic” is not a monolithic construct, made up of a fixed set of cultural binaries of west/rest; self/other; modern/traditional but is mobilized through a *specific account of locality*. The “local” remains an important sociological category. Rather than mere agents of global capitalism or indigenous elites, these artists exemplify the sheer *empiricality* of the local as an element of global postmodernism. The local, speaks in/through many contexts (age in the case of Buena Vista) and it is its imbrication within and across these multiple areas that allows for its viability in the modern world. To put it another way, the global (postmodern) cannot exist without the local.

Second, the “authentic” in World Music is tied intimately to the kinesthetic and psychological experience of the artist. What connects World Music fans to its music is the *pleasure* of watching/listening/experiencing their music. The voice and presence of, Ferrer (and other luminaries of World Music), are eloquent testimony to the return of the “authentic” in an age of global mass production. To put this more speculatively, the centering of *performativity as authenticity*

separates World Music from the mass produced genuflections that structure celebrity performance elsewhere. The (global) postmodern is not reducible to the language of the marketplace (even as it must speak through it) but takes center stage through the language of performance.

Finally, the “authentic” in the work of World Music allows for a contextual, localized *and* transcultural account of identity in the modern world. In the end, what connects *Buena Vista* to the work of global postmodernity is the cultural work they perform. If global postmodernism is the discursive centering and movement of identity politics, then the artists of Buena Vista represent—through the biographical and discursive imprint of their music—the *performance of identity*.

Needless to add, a number of research questions around “tracking” authenticity remain unanswered, and a few can be posed for future work: How can authenticity be “tracked” in other spatial contexts (Asian, Latin American, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, East European)? How is “gender” as a construct about “authenticity” framed across historical contexts? How is “religion” recast in contemporary narratives about political life, as seen for example in patriotic songs and films? Why has “youth culture” (as opposed to old age) become the standard bearer for musical expression?

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