

«We are here»

Indie cultural economics and auratic audiovisual authenticity

Michael Arnold

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Abstract / Resumen / Résumé / Riassunto

This article investigates the cultural economics of the international indie scene with a special focus on the Seville-based four-piece indie neoflamenco band named Pony Bravo and specifically on the group's prolific sonic and graphic montage visionary, Daniel Alonso Mallén. Pony Bravo draws on a variety of music traditions, connecting the sound and rhythm of the various marginalized «souths»: U.S. southern roots rock and blues, Andalusian rock, flamenco, African and Jamaican rhythms, etc. As they play with these traditions, the group uses their platform to fight for the right to do so: to borrow, to sample, to quote, to remix, to collage, to recycle the rhythms, melodies, harmonies, lyrics, ideas, and images of those creators and tricksters that came before them. With help from Walter Benjamin's dichotomy between auratic and nonauratic artforms, this article explores the inflation of subcultural capital in indie music (through fan assimilation of nonauratic knowledge) and the elevation of the auratic live artifact as a reaction by those who would keep that currency in check. Daniel Alonso elevates the auratic moment captured as content within the nonauratic form of the archived online promotional poster. He simultaneously champions the demise of all forms of the nonauratic in his embrace of a sort of cultural capital socialism vis-à-vis creative commons (instead of intellectual property) licensing and his antagonistic stance toward the institutions (the SGAE) and legislation (*la ley Sinde*) that fight for the protection of national and international artists' IP rights.

Este artículo investiga la economía cultural de la escena *indie* internacional con un enfoque especial en la banda de neoflamenco indie con base en Sevilla llamada Pony Bravo y, específicamente, en Daniel Alonso Mallén, cantante de la banda y visionario prolífico del montaje gráfico y sonoro. Pony Bravo se basa en una variedad de tradiciones musicales, conectando el sonido y el ritmo de los distintos «sures» marginados: El blues y el rock de sureño de Estados Unidos, el rock andaluz, el flamenco, los ritmos africano y jamaicano, etc. Mientras juegan con estas tradiciones, el grupo utiliza su plataforma para luchar por el derecho a hacerlo: tomar prestado, *samplear*, citar, remezclar, *collagear*, reciclar los ritmos, melodías, armonías, letras, ideas e imágenes de los creadores y embaucadores que los precedieron. Con la ayuda de la dicotomía de Walter Benjamin entre formas de arte auráticas y no auráticas, este artículo explora la inflación del capital subcultural en la música *indie* (a través de la asimilación de los conocimientos no auráticos) y la elevación del artefacto aurático (el concierto en vivo) como una reacción de quienes querrían controlar esa inflación. Daniel Alonso eleva el momento aurático capturado como contenido dentro de la forma no

aurático del cartel promocional archivado en línea. Simultáneamente, aboga por la aniquilación de todas las formas de lo no aurático en su abrazo de una especie de socialismo con respecto al capital cultural a través de las licencias Creative Commons en vez de la propiedad intelectual y su postura antagónica hacia las instituciones (SGAE) y la legislación (la ley Sinde) que luchan por la protección de los derechos de propiedad intelectual de artistas nacionales e internacionales.

Cet article examine l'économie culturelle de la scène indépendante internationale, avec une attention particulière sur le groupe indépendant néoflamenco sévilien de quatre musiciens Pony Bravo, et plus particulièrement sur Daniel Alonso Mallén, son visionnaire prolifique de montage sonore et graphique. Pony Bravo s'appuie sur plusieurs traditions musicales, reliant le son et le rythme des divers «suds» marginalisés: le *roots rock* et blues du sud des États-Unis, le rock andalou, le flamenco, les rythmes africains et jamaïcains, etc. Pendant qu'ils jouent avec ces traditions, le groupe utilise leur plate-forme pour se battre pour le droit de le faire: d'emprunter, d'échantillonner, de citer, de remixer, de coller, et de recycler les rythmes, les mélodies, les harmonies, les paroles, les idées, et les images des créateurs et fripons qui les ont précédés. À l'aide de la dichotomie de Walter Benjamin entre les formes d'art auratiques et nonauratiques, cet article explore l'inflation du capital sous-culturelle dans la musique indépendante (par l'assimilation des admirateurs de la connaissance non-auratique) et l'élévation de l'artefact auratique vivant par ceux qui voudraient contrôler ce devise. Daniel Alonso élève le moment auratique capturé comme contenu dans la forme non-auratique de l'affiche promotionnelle archivée en ligne. Simultanément, il approuve la mort de toutes formes du non-auratique avec son soutien d'un genre de socialisme de capital culturel vis-à-vis la licence Creative Commons et sa position antagoniste contre les institutions (le SGAE) et le législation (la loi Sinde) qui luttent pour la protection des droits de PI des artistes nationaux et internationaux.

Questo articolo indaga sulla economia culturale della scena «indie» internazionale focalizzando specialmente sul quartetto indie e neoflamenco sevigliano, Pony Bravo, e specificamente su Daniel Alonso Mallén, il loro prolífico visionario del montaggio sonoro e grafico. I Poni Bravo ricorrono a una varietà di tradizioni musicali collegando suoni e ritmi degli diversi «Sud» emarginati: il *roots rock* e i blues del sud statunitense, il rock andaluso, il flamenco, i ritmi africani e giamaicani, ecc. Mentre sperimentano con queste tradizioni, utilizzano la piattaforma del gruppo per lottare per il diritto di farlo: prendere in prestito, fare dei *samples*, citare, remixare, fare dei *collages*, riciclare i ritmi, le melodie, le armonie, le parole, le idee e le immagini di quei creatori e imbroglioni chi li hanno preceduti. Con l'aiuto della dicotomia benjaminiana fra le forme d'arte auratiche e le nonauratiche, questo articolo esplora l'inflazione del capitale sottoculturale nella sfera della musica indie (dovuta all'assimilazione da parte dei fan della conoscenza nonaurati-

ca) e l'elevazione dell'artefatto auratico in vivo come una risposta a coloro che cercano di tenere tale inflazione sotto controllo. Daniel Alonso eleva il momento auratico catturato come contenuto dentro la forma nonauratica del manifesto promozionale archiviato in rete. Simultaneamente, sostiene l'annientamento di tutte le forme del nonauratico, abbracciando una specie di socialismo del capitale culturale nei confronti del Creative Commons e il un atteggiamento antagonista nei confronti delle istituzioni (SGAE) e la legislazione (la legge Sinde) come lotta per la protezione dei diritti nazionali e internazionali di proprietà intellettuale

Palabras clave / Mots-clé / Key words / Parole chiave

Pony Bravo, rock, blues, flamenco, cultural economics, audiovisual authenticity
Pony Bravo, rock, blues, flamenco, economía cultural, autenticidad audiovisual
Pony Bravo, rock, blues, flamenco, économie culturelle, authenticité audiovisuelle
Pony Bravo, rock, blues, flamenco, economia culturale, autenticità audiovisiva



[...] and then it became a wider thing about people who grip onto other people's creations like they are their own.

James Murphy, LCD Soundsystem

Pony Bravo members Daniel Alonso (vocals and keyboard) and Pablo Peña (bass and guitar) come across in many of their interviews as apathetic, sarcastic hipsters. Often decked out in ironic, secondhand clothing (woven Christmas sweaters, Hawaiian shirts, wifebeaters, etc.), sporting scruffy facial hair, bedhead, and bedface, the band doesn't strike a very serious profile. And yet according to Alonso, when it comes to the political potential of their art, Pony Bravo is dedicated and sincere:

Tomar una actitud subversiva o crítica para mí no es una elección sino una obligación. Porque me parece una falta de respeto montar un grupo y forzar de cierta manera... sin tener en cuenta todo lo que se ha hecho. Entonces al final la decisión de meter un poco de caña con los carteles o las canciones... pues que si no, no merece la pena para nosotros montar toda la movida... El humor ayuda que activa la parte más inteligente... y ayuda un poco a poder hablar de otros temas.

(«Entrevista a Pony Bravo»)¹

¹ To take a subversive or critical position for me is not a choice but an obligation. Because it seems to me like a lack of respect when someone works hard to try to start a band... without considering what has been done before [by other influential bands, artists, thinkers, historical figures, etc.]. So, in the end, the decision to poke a bit of fun with the posters or the songs... if we didn't do that it wouldn't be worth it for us. Humor helps activate intelligence... and it helps a bit to provide a space in which to talk about other [more important] topics.

Pony Bravo's political subversion often manifests itself as a leftist critique of regional, national, and supranational politics as well as Anglophone cultural/political hegemony. The band engages controversial local and global socio-political topics vis-à-vis a hybrid combination of Spanish popular cultural imagery along with flamenco, copla, and Andalusian rock music traditions blended with an indie soundscape and aesthetic. One issue in particular that the group addresses in both sound and image, critical to the present study, has been the right and the need for the creators of culture to build on the work of their influences and artistic ancestors. The creative, original hybrid artistry of Pony Bravo, and specifically that of the band's prolific sonic and graphic montage visionary, Daniel Alonso Mallén, relies on several strata of local, national, and global folk and mass culture products to connect with an audience that can appreciate such dense signification.

Pony Bravo's music has been interpreted by fans and Spanish music critics as an attempt to connect the sound and rhythm of the various marginalized «souths»: U.S. southern roots rock and blues, Andalusian rock, flamenco, African and Jamaican rhythms, etc. (Ceballos; Pato, 2010; Txopo, 2010; Guerola, n.d.). The band musically draws inspiration from a diverse set of canons: the flamenco styling of Manolo Caracol and the blues of Son House, The Doors and Triana, Captain Beefheart and Bambino, etc. Pony Bravo underscores analogies between these various influences via their own music. Although the indie sound is what most frequently predominates in Pony Bravo's musical creation, they are also building on regional music traditions.

The band's incorporation of flamenco, *copla*, and Andalusian rock rhythms, melodies, harmonies, lyrics and tropes is evident in several of the songs they have released to date. When performing live, lead singer Daniel Alonso occasionally will warm his vocals to the song's key via the *temple*. The *temple* is traditionally initiated by the flamenco singer within the first few measures of music performed by the guitarist. It is used as a means to condition the voice to the tone and tempo of any flamenco tune. A recorded example of Alonso's

use of *temple* can be found on the track «El rayo». «El rayo» borrows lyrics, rhythms, and vocal melodies from the Beni De Cádiz song «Tormento de mis tormentos» and from Manolo Caracol's «Yo no le temo a los rayos» and «Rosa venenosa». The guitar in «El rayo» is performed via a muted attack on all strings, functioning primarily as a percussive instrument that simulates the steady, rapid beat of the *palmas* on «Tormento de mis tormentos». ² This rhythmic structure is doubled toward the end via the incorporation of the drums which ever so slightly echo the rapid beat established by Dario del Moral's muted guitar strum. Both Pony Bravo's «El rayo» and Beni de Cádiz's «Tormento de mis tormentos» begin with the following verses:

*Yo no le temo a los rayos.
yo no le temo a los rayos,
porque tienen luz y brío
lo mismo que mi caballo*

Death here is not to be feared because it is quick and brilliant. It is indeed a steadfast friend--compared to the Andalusian male's centuries-old loyal companion, the horse. Although «El rayo» then diverges lyrically from «Tormento de mis tormentos», the sentiment expressed in both songs is similar. Both seem to warn the listener of the tragedy inherent in loving certain types of women. Beni de Cádiz learns the hard way to stay away from such women after falling in love with one María de los Dolores. He generalizes the loss of sanity he experienced by loving this woman to denounce the love of any woman:

*Yo me enamoré una vez;
Ya no me enamoro más.
Yo tengo por entendido,
que el hombre que se enamora
termina loco perdido.*

The love of this woman left the protagonist withering, lost and insane--a slow, agonizing death compared with that brought by the lightning bolt. Alonso puts

these lyrics in dialogue with a synthesis of two stanzas from Manolo Caracol's «Rosa venenosa», composed by the song writing team that epitomized the Andalusian copla of 1940s and 1950s Spain: Quintero, León y Quiroga. ³ «Rosa venenosa» is just one example of the many lyrics penned by this team that conflate women with a web of pure metaphors that connect nature's delicate beauty with its bewitching enchantment and destructive potential:

*Eres una boguera de color moreno.
En tu bello pelo se muere cualquiera.
Vete de mí vera, rosa venenosa,
que dejas señales de penas mortales
por donde has pasao.*

(Alonso, «El rayo»)

In this Pony Bravo mashup the lyrics are framed primarily by rhythmic elements: the muted guitar, drums, drumsticks, cymbals. The guitar is limited almost entirely to a single C#m7 chord strummed and quickly muted at the beginning of each measure. The percussive elements get a Martin Hannett-inspired treatment which provides some textural depth for the listener as the different rhythms reverberate and overlap slightly. This minimalist post-punk musical scaffolding is doubled by the lethargic, almost slack-jawed, vocal delivery of Daniel Alonso that turns the constantly climactic drama of the *zambra*/*tientos* originals on their head. Alonso does play with some vocal dynamics and there are some crescendos that keep the tune lively, but on the whole it is far more sparse and emotionally reserved than the original versions that the band draws on. More recently the band's 2019 release *Guru* features a similar lyrical homage synthesis of two hybrid flamenco acts.

³ The playwright, film script writer, and *copla* author Antonio Quintero Ramírez is best known for his compositions of popular songs for flamenco and *copla* icons such as Pepe Marchena, Imperio Argentina, Lola Flores, Concha Piquer, etc. Rafael de León was a poet, scriptwriter, and *copla* author. He is often associated with the Spanish *Generación del 27*. León's lyricism is marked by an interest in Andalusian Costumbrism, poeticizing the wit and grit of rural Andalusian culture. The prolific Manuel Quiroga composed the music for this trio. In addition to his collaboration with León and Quintero, Quiroga also penned over 5,000 musical compositions.

² *Palmas* is a rapid rhythmic clapping that accompanies many flamenco songs.

The track «Loca mente» combines lyrics by the Catalan rumba/rumba flamenca artist El Luis and the flamenco/rock/disco band Las Grecas hit «Te estoy amando locamente». Pony Bravo's approach to this song and its diachronic dialogue with the tropes and tones of flamenco past in general, performed via a twenty-first-century international indie identity and soundscape, provides its national audience with a manner in which to engage the past/present and the local/global: They are hybrid culture connoisseurs of a contemporary glocally constructed imagined community. The band builds on a sturdy edifice of many music traditions that have, themselves, relied on the creations and generic fusions of their artistic ancestors. As they play with these traditions, the group uses their platform to fight for the right to do so: to borrow, to sample, to quote, to remix, to collage, to recycle the rhythms, melodies, harmonies, lyrics, ideas, and images of those creators and tricksters that came before them.

Pony Bravo's hybridity defies genres in many ways, blending so many categories of musics: the aforementioned marginalized «south» traditions along with dub, electronica, post-punk, new wave, noise, etc. The overarching sound and aesthetic, nevertheless, is the very wide umbrella category known as indie. This broad genre, though seemingly in decline, is still fairly popular and has global reach. It is suffering some trials as of late, a few of which I explore in the next section which takes an economic lens to the effects on bands like Pony Bravo of what I refer to as conspicuous cultural consumption: An original artist is celebrated by the indie scene, quickly appropriated by the mainstream, forgotten by the indie fan, and finally forgotten by the mainstream. He or she is the «Kleenex» that is useful today and incinerated tomorrow. This could be seen as the product of what David Jennings terms 'diseases of affluence': «with so much readily available entertainment, there's a risk that we become less discerning when we are listening to it and trying it out... the degree of accessibility and choice has arguably led to a rather passive attitude towards music in everyday life» (2007: 113-114).

Indie Cultural Economics⁴

Ever since the first underground DIY 'zine was sloppily patched together, the «independent» mindset of the typical indie fan has been heavily influenced by this important cultural gatekeeper. Indie opinions have been molded for decades according to the tastes of a select group of tastemaker critics. With such power in their hands, their decision on a particular new release—whether they are writing for the seminal music revue weeklies such as *New Musical Express* (NME), *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, or for influential online sites such as *Pitchfork Media*—has a dramatic effect on the potential sustained success of the band in question. The ratings of songs, albums, and bands by these tastemakers have a direct effect on the bottom line for these musicians given that so many faithful NME and *Pitchfork* readers will buy accordingly.

From an economic perspective, these critics play an important role in the indie scene due to their ability to winnow down a vast gamut of possible commodities into a select canon. The value of any release can be quantified in comparison to other recent albums as critiques are often based on a numerical rating system. As more and more indie bands find cheap and easy ways to produce albums, the proliferation of available music over the first two decades of the twenty-first century has created a supply that is so far beyond the actual demand that the services provided by the indie music critic is akin to a visible hand pushing down the supply curve toward an acceptable price equilibrium. Nevertheless, indie music journalists suffer from a debilitating

⁴ The term indie developed as a generic indicator out of the independent underground (mostly Anglophone) music scene during the 1970 to the 1980s. After the rampant success of the Aberdeen-based grunge band Nirvana's first major label release *Nevermind* (1991) with DGC Records, other major labels scrambled to cash in on what was also known as «alternative», «progressive», or «modern» rock. The co-optation and commercialization of indie bands by major labels involved a major label buying the contract of a band from an indie label or buying the entire label outright. Indie rock became a catch-all term for more visible, yet still non-mainstream rock, and nearly all rock that could be found on ever-larger independent record labels and indie subsidiaries of the majors. For an elaborate lassoing of the signs and practices that define indie music, see Chapter 1, «What is 'Indie'?» in anthropologist Wendy Fonarow's study *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (2006).

supply curve akin to the bands they rate. Just as indie groups are finding it easier and cheaper to create music, renegade music critics can create their own forum with a keystroke and an evangelical fan base. This twenty-first-century omnipresent supply of free music criticism has pressured established weeklies and websites to remain competitive by constantly searching for new musical creations in order to keep reader interest and attention. The subscribers to a gatekeeper like NME trade economic capital for cultural capital in order to remain abreast of such new indie and underground talent. Ever since the advent of music blogs like Pitchfork and Brooklyn Vegan, the indie music fan no longer need sacrifice economic capital in exchange for a constant supply of this information. The recent phenomenon of a free music blogosphere has fostered an environment for the exponential growth of amateur music criticism. The result of this exponential growth in music criticism is akin to the cable 24-hour news cycle: constant repetition, an infinite supply of barely distinguishable angles on a recent event, ridiculous hyperbole, and rapid turnover. The speed of revelation and dismissal of new indie bands has the intensity of a strobe light.

The channel surf mentality of indie music press is hardly a new phenomenon; it has just grown more assiduous and aggressive. Prior to the new millennium, a band such as R.E.M., after reaching a certain status in the world of indie music, could be assured that every new release would be reviewed in all major indie music weeklies, would receive fairly decent marks, and would sell accordingly.⁵ The lifespan of a would-be R.E.M., nowadays, is substantially shorter due in large part to the aforementioned forces which affect band and critic alike. Rob Fitzpatrick highlighted in October 2011 how common it has become for indie bands to hit it big on the first album, only to see sales drop by up to 90% for the following release. Fitzpatrick, who investigates what he terms «band collapse syndrome, » mentions several factors that could lead to this phenomenon while

underscoring the importance today of radio support. Fitzpatrick scarcely even mentions print media. The author also cynically comments on indie fan and label support, indicating that both seem only to support the current hitmaker, «if success has many parents, failure is an orphan» (Fitzpatrick, 2011). In a 2010 interview for Heineken's online music blog, Pony Bravo voiced a desire that is shared by many indie musicians—to be given the sufficient time and the critical support necessary to evolve and to find a coherent voice: «*Ahora nos va bien con el humor andaluz y la música psicodélica y progresiva pero lo mismo un día deja de hacer gracia y nos ponen a parir*» (Gallardo, 2010)⁶.

Indie anthropologist Wendy Fonarow sees this particular sickness (of an increasingly shorter attention span amongst critics and fans alike) as a result of the desire of a large segment of individuals within the indie community to constantly be ahead of the pack. For music critics, obviously, it is a part of their job. For the fans, it is a matter of reputation amongst their peers which manifests itself as cultural capital:

In a particular segment of the indie community, once a member personally discovers a great band, he feels a certain proprietary right to the band. He will try to get other friends to like the band, but at the same time he feels that the band is 'his.' When the band becomes successful, his ownership feels diluted as if some personal control over the artist has been lost.

(Fonarow, 2006: 64)

The fan here generously shares a sort of cultural insider information, only to later feel a desire to wish his words back. This can be seen as a sort of cultural renegeing. The fan believes he has inadvertently contributed to the fame of the band and regrets his cultural capital profligacy. If he hadn't so adamantly promoted the band they never would have reached such levels of success, and he would still be able to see the group perform in a small, intimate club. He feels a loss. His research can now be considered a sunk cost, irretrievable

⁵ After over thirty years as a successful indie band, R.E.M. finally called it quits in September of 2011.

⁶ «Nowadays people enjoy our Andalusian humor, and our psychedelic and progressive music, but it's likely one day it won't be funny anymore, and people will start badmouthing us».

as the knowledge he helped to divulge is now shared by all. As we see here, for the indie fan on the vanguard, cultural capital too can suffer inflationary pressures.

This inflation of cultural (or rather subcultural) capital has been exacerbated by the easy access to the ubiquitous amount of literature and audiovisual information on past and present cult and underground bands available on the internet. In the past this kind of insider information was available only to a select group of dedicated underground music fans who followed the minutiae of a handful of very influential, but at the time, mostly unknown music groups *vis-à-vis* handmade zines and invite-only basement shows. The corporate exploitation of the early nineties American grunge scene was the final nail in the coffin for indie misfit culture. This co-optation of the last vestiges of indie subculture essentially normalized the practice through its forced incorporation into mass media. The tastemakers of yore perceived the beginning of their end as subcultural capital monopolists within the realm of marginalized indie musical experimentation. Their role as curators of the best that Anglophone indie music had to offer increasingly diminished over the course of the final decade of the twentieth century as indie became more aesthetically accessible and more widely enjoyed by traditionally mainstream audiences. The indie canon also became easier to access as pre-Google search engines like Yahoo and AltaVista helped direct dedicated, young indie novices to the roots of their indie scene of choice. The subcultural capital benefactors and tastemakers saw their influence wane on a local as well as global scale.

The massive success of Anglophone indie culminated around the turn of the millennium with the advent of the overnight successes, a phenomenon that only the twenty-first-century internet era could provide. Viral marketing campaigns helped ignite the sphere of proto-social networks, causing word-of-mouth dissemination to catapult bands like The Strokes to instant stardom. The sentiment of a loss of purpose, and indeed a lack of identity amongst old school indie fans is voiced succinctly in the lyrics penned by LCD Soundsystem

frontman James Murphy on their first single «Losing My Edge, » released July 8th, 2002:

Yeah, I'm losing my edge.
 I'm losing my edge.
 The kids are coming up from behind.
 I'm losing my edge.
 I'm losing my edge to the kids from France and from London.
 But I was there.

 I was there in 1968.
 I was there at the first Can show in Cologne.
 I'm losing my edge.
 I'm losing my edge to the kids whose footsteps I hear when they get on the decks.
 I'm losing my edge to the internet seekers who can tell me every member of every good group from 1962 to 1978.

Murphy, within the first three stanzas of the song, underscores several of the sources causing the twenty-first-century indie hipster a particularly grating anxiety. After all the years of groundbreaking toil in disseminating the concept of *fin de siècle* cool for the rest of the would-be hip world to follow (according to the traditional roles of center-periphery indie relations), the global reach of the information age allowed for a leveling of the subcultural capital playing field. The barriers to entry for a would-be tastemaker were limited only by the speed of his internet connection. From London to Berlin to Tokyo to Brooklyn, everyone who could devote the time to studying the indie canon and scouring the internet for the latest hot new sound and video was now potentially hipper, more knowledgeable, and anxiously eager to usurp the power of the established gatekeepers of yesteryear.

And what is the only defense that this fallen subcultural tycoon (as voiced by Murphy) can muster? «I was there». This is, in essence, the only expression of cool that the new generation of hipsters cannot lay claim to: actually *seeing* the first Can show in West Germany or the Modern Lovers open for The New York Dolls at the Mercer Arts Center on the first day of an auspicious 1973, etc. Actually *being* there. Sure they can know it happened, and maybe they can even describe several of the intimate details of the event, but it is no replace-

ment for the first-hand experience that they will never have access to. This is the last shred of symbolic and subcultural capital that the original indie diehard (which Murphy here represents) can hold onto.

Murphy's defiant «I was there» echoes the Benjaminian dichotomy between auratic and nonauratic artforms: «In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject» (Benjamin, 2008: 21). Walter Benjamin claims that the reproduction of the work of art leads to the withering of its aura because it «detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence» (*id.*: 22).⁷ The devaluation of the «here and now» authenticity of an original work of art via technological reproducibility affects the authority of the work itself as well as that of the canon to which it belongs. This is thus a challenge to the dominant powers of artistic orthodoxy that decide the canon past and present, and a subversion of hegemonic power in general:

If the work of art remains a fetish, a distanced and distancing object that exerts an irrational and incontrovertible power, it attains a cultural position that lends it a sacrosanct inviolability. It also remains in the hands of a privileged few. The auratic work exerts claims to power that parallel and reinforce the larger claims to political power of the class for whom such objects are most meaningful: the ruling class. The theoretical defense of auratic art was and is central to the maintenance of their power. It is not just that auratic art, with its ritually certified representational strategies, poses no threat to the dominant class, but that the sense of authenticity, authority, and permanence projected by the auratic work of art represents an

⁷ Aura, for Benjamin, is «a strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch» (2008: 23). Jennings elaborates on this sense of distance (in the art world) as a figurative distance between the work of art and its beholder—«a psychological inapproachability—an authority—claimed for the work on the basis of its position within a tradition» (*id.*: 14). Benjamin considers the aura's decay as «the desire of the present-day masses to 'get closer' to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction» (*id.*: 23).

important cultural substantiation of the claims to power of the dominant class.

(Jennings, 2008: 15)⁸

By stating «I was there» Murphy is invoking his authority as guardian of the indie canon in that he witnessed the authentic aura of the artwork involved in the original live spectacle of the first Can show in Cologne, for example. Murphy laments the shattering of this important indie tradition in the era of Google, YouTube, and Wikipedia. But more so he mourns the loss of his own subcultural capital as the nonauratic reproduction (or knowledge) of the live show has allowed for an indiscriminate redistribution of such capital amongst the indie masses—the art-school Brooklynites, the kids from France, London, Tokyo, and Berlin. As in Benjamin's time, we are again seeing how the construction of an alternative system of power that could potentially challenge the dominant structures (embodied here by Murphy as metonym for the superstructure of international indie gatekeepers) is enabled vis-à-vis the simultaneous collective reception of a video copy of the New York Doll's August 27, 1973 performance at Max's Kansas City uploaded to YouTube (for example).

James Murphy offers some insight into the inspiration for this song which perfectly encapsulates the trappings of accumulated subcultural capital:

when i was djing, playing can, liquid liquid, esg, all that kind of stuff, i became kind of cool for a moment, which was a total anomaly. and when i heard other djs playing similar music i was like: 'fuck! i'm out of a job! these are my records!' but it was like someone had crept into my brain and said all these words that i hate. did i make the records? did i fuck! so, i started becoming horrified by my own attitude. i had this moment of glory though. people would use me to dj just to get them cool.

⁸ Whereas Jennings is analyzing the role of aura in the preservation of canonical, established art (tied to the ruling classes), Murphy is a spokesperson for the countercultural indie music tradition, and thus neither canonical nor established in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, the claims which are underpinned by his statement «I was there» parallel the very same elite fetishization of the auratic work of art. There is, in fact, a widely agreed-upon indie canon which Murphy refers to within «Losing My Edge» by namedropping a few of its contributors (Suicide, The Modern Lovers, Can, etc.). The ruling class which exerts its claims to power vis-à-vis the auratic work within the indie scene is a mirror of that described by Jennings.

they'd be like 'it's the cool rock disco guy' and this was really weird. and to be honest i was afraid that this new found coolness was going to go away and that's where 'losing my edge' comes from. it is about being horrified by my own silliness. and then it became a wider thing about people who grip onto other people's creations like they are their own. there is a lot of pathos in that character though because it's born out of inadequacy and love.

(Doran, 2005)

Murphy captures here a certain attitude that is prevalent amongst much of the twenty-first-century hipster ilk: a self-satisfied smugness in being a fount of cool from which others can draw, combined with a self-disgust experienced when flashes of pride surge from such seemingly ridiculous and superficial sources of cultural capital. The pathos that Murphy describes succinctly captures many of the details of the collective practices, strategies, challenges, and stances that give us a rough sketch of indie sensibility and cultural economics. Pony Bravo's track «Mi DNI», penned and sung by Pablo Peña, off of their 2013 release *De palmas y cacería* provides a similar indie metastance as that of «Losing My Edge». The song begins with the expository verse, «*El otro día, un tío, después de un concierto/ Ven conmigo, que te invito, dice...*». What follows, as they divvy up some lines of coke, is basically a laundry list of all of the annoying things that scenesters say at a show, punctuated with overt references to the fan's cultural capital:

*... Os parecís a los Doors
y un poco a Triana, pero me gustáis más vosotros
yo puedo meteros en algún festival
yo soy un tío que controlo
escribo en la Rockdelux y también en la Staff
manejo bien el rollo
yo estoy donde tengo que estar
¿sabes que yo también toco?...

el mes que viene vamos a triunfar
vamos a sacar un single, dos épés, un vinilo
seguramente nos lo edite Mushroom Pillow
es uno de los sellos underground que más se mueven
y de los más conocidos
mi grupo está muy bien
tenemos la pose, el carisma*

*tenemos el estilo, buenos contactos,
cuatro videoclips, un DVD
223.000 amigos*

The fan/dealer shows off an ability to identify influences that the Pony Bravo member must have heard thousands of times by now. This is followed by an immediate one-upmanship relating to the pull that this fan has in the scene: He is an influential music journal writer and he also plays. The listener is then beaten over the head with the subcultural capital of the fan who is «just about to be super famous» and who will soon be working with one of the best known underground labels. This comical antithesis is yet very realistic as a product of the indie cultural economy described above. The existential despair that we empathetically intuit here is similar to that of Murphy in «Losing my edge». It is the suffocating presence of the indie Other (who in «Mi DNI» is the only one that speaks), always breathing down your neck. It is a shared insecurity, born from inadequacy and self-loathing, that recognizes their shared mortality in an indie Kleenex culture.

The Work of Art in the Age of Creative Commons

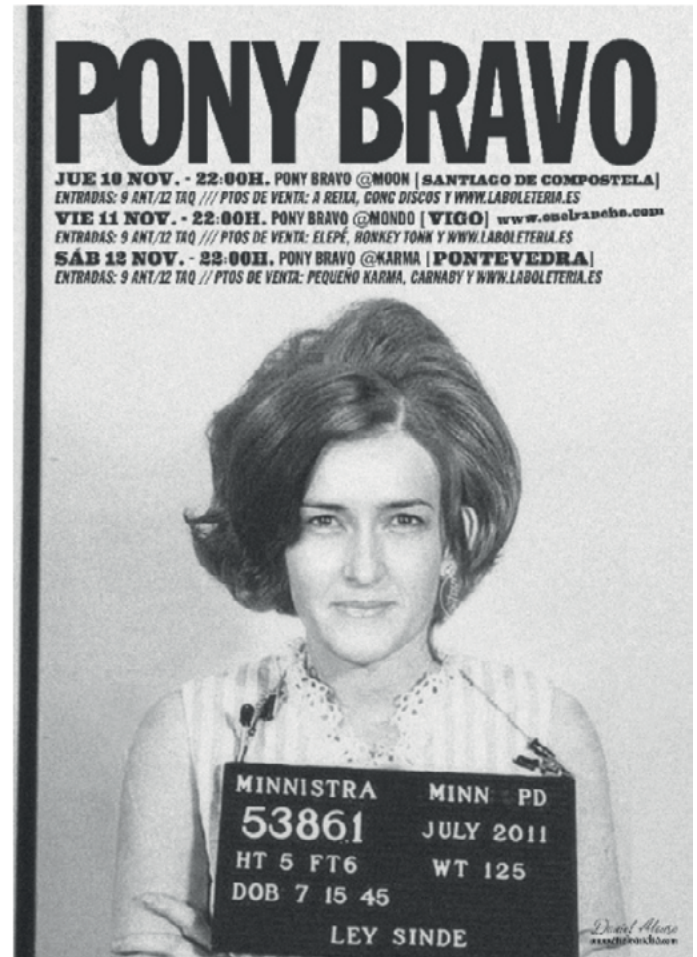
This cultural conspicuous consumption is just a mirror of a globalized hypercapitalist system that requires planned obsolescence in order to reproduce itself on a daily basis. Pony Bravo provides a critique of capitalism, the international economic inequality it consistently generates, and the global neoliberal system that politically undergirds it in many of their songs («Super-Broker», «China da miedo», «El político neoliberal», «Turista ven a Sevilla», «Ibitza», «Relax y Rolex», among others). The members of Pony Bravo are *bricoleurs*, picking through the rubbish, ruins, and riches of the Kleenex culture to comment on what it means to be an active, globally concerned, twenty-first century Spaniard. The band's wild play of musical and lyrical signs is visually reinforced via the concert and album promotional photo-

montage poster art designed by Daniel Alonso Maillén. Many of these *carteles* are archived in the virtual online art gallery that is Alonso's Tumblr page and Pony Bravo's Flickr page.

The most common symbols that populate Alonso's photomontage artistry are Sevillian landmarks like the Giralda or the Torre del Oro; local cultural objects of Alonso's fascination such as the *nazareno* or Curro, the mascot for the 1992 Universal Exposition of Seville; international pop culture icons (Darth Vader and Chewbacca, Gizmo, Marty McFly, MacGyver, Michael Jackson, etc.). The most common subjects of his derision are very powerful, politically conservative national and international figures and institutions: The Spanish royal family, Mariano Rajoy, the Partido Popular, George Bush, Dick Cheney, Osama bin Laden, the American military, the catholic church, capitalist fat cats. These local, national, and international symbols of endearment and ire are often juxtaposed together in Alonso's work to jar the spectator with a caustic humor.

The *carteles* function as a time stamp first to promote then to preserve the live event of Pony Bravo shows. These collages are more than a typical band show poster, however, they are rich works of subversive artistry in which Alonso integrates images and icons which belong to diverse semantic chains into a cohesive narrative imagery that manages to comment simultaneously on international and local issues. The Tumblr and Flickr archives play, consciously or unconsciously, with the Benjaminian auratic-nonauratic dichotomy. The prolific output of Alonso for Pony Bravo could easily be the subject of an entire book on the rearticulation of national and international signifiers. They would certainly make a fascinating gallery show.⁹ Nevertheless, collected together in this way, one couldn't help but notice what would seem an oddity in any other art show: the proliferation throughout the oeuvre of days of the week, dates, months, times, cities, clubs, bands,

⁹ They did, in fact, when the Colectivo Imásmúsica, in collaboration with Telegrama Cultural, showcased a retrospective of Alonso's work, titled «Giral DJ: fotomontajes, obra gráfica y remezcla visual» from November 26th, 2015 to January 16, 2016 at the Centro de las Artes de Sevilla.



Cartel Pony Ginferno (March 17, 2011).

ticket prices, Myspace pages, YouTube sites, etc. These logistical ephemera of yesteryear allow the auratic live event to coalesce into and linger within the non-auratic, eminently reproducible, *even copyright free*, online image.¹⁰ James Murphy's «I was there», which grasps pathetically to the «here and now» authenticity of the live performance—to reclaim the gold standard of subcultural capital—is juxtaposed like so many other signifiers in Alonso's *carteles* with the very sign of the aura's decay.

¹⁰ These images are registered copyleft, or Creative Commons, a form of licensing which can be used to establish and hold copyright conditions for works such as art, software, documents, etc. Under copyleft, the author implicitly gives anyone who receives a copy of a specific work the permission to reproduce, adapt or distribute it, with the only requirement being that any copies or adaptations that result from the original work be bound by the same licensing agreement. This can be compared to standard copyright law which prohibits any adaption, reproduction, and/or distribution of the author's original work.



Cartel *Pony Ginferno* (March 17, 2011).

Daniel Alonso elevates the auratic moment captured as content within the nonauratic form of the archived online promotional poster. He simultaneously champions the demise of all forms of the nonauratic in his embrace of a sort of cultural capital socialism vis-à-vis creative commons intellectual property (IP) licensing and his antagonistic stance toward the institutions (the SGAE) and legislation (*ley Sinde*) that fight for the protection of national and international artists' IP rights.¹¹

¹¹ Writer-director Ángeles González-Sinde was appointed as Spain's Culture Minister from April 2009 until December 2011, holding media piracy as her top priority. On March 4th, 2011, as part of the Ley de Economía Sostenible (Economic Sustainability Law, LES), a new law, *la Ley Sinde*, was passed with the goal of regulating internet use in an effort to protect national artists' intellectual property rights. The Sinde law allows for the removal of content, or the interruption of service, of any website which provides Spanish users with the ability to illegally down-



Cartel *Pony Bravo keroxen* (September 28, 2011).

Both the author of the Sinde legislation, Ángeles González-Sinde, and the SGAE were targets of Alonso's photomontage artwork.

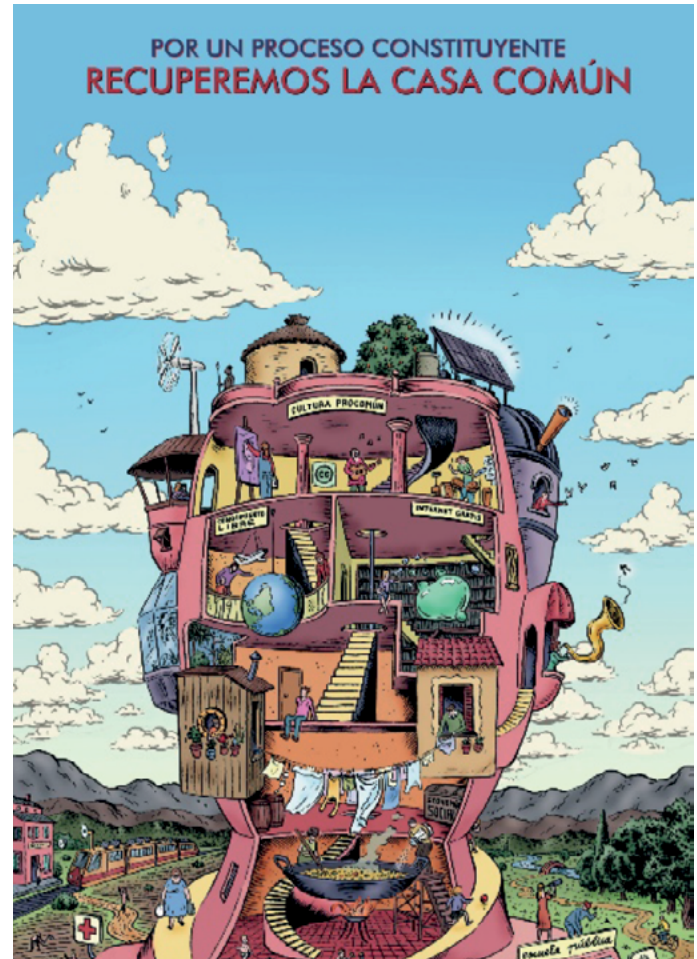
Alonso draws inspiration for his artwork from, among others, Josep Renau and Miguel Brieva.¹² This

load copyrighted material whether or not the site is hosted on a server in Spain. The SGAE is the primary collecting society for songwriters, composers and music publishers in Spain, akin to the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) in the United States. Both Sinde and the SGAE were targets of Alonso's photomontage artwork.

¹² Josep Renau Berenguer, born in Valencia in 1907 was a painter known primarily for his photomontages and murals which often celebrated communist principles while attacking fascism and what he perceived as an inherent hypocrisy of Western capitalist countries (and more specifically American) which, in the pursuit of the freedom to consume as much as possible, had left only death and destruction of much rest of the world in their wake. Miguel Brieva, born in Seville in 1974, is a Spanish humorist known for his 40s- and 50s- era vignettes reminiscent of American films and commercials, which are normally accompanied by short texts typically socio-political in nature.



La Industria Cultural, ©Daniel Alonso 2007 (August 7, 2008).



Miguel Brieva, *La casa común* (September 24, 2012).

mix of influences is readily apparent in the social and political commentaries that are often the central focus of Alonso's imagery. One of the primary preoccupations that Alonso shares with these artists relates to the deleterious effect of capitalism on culture and, hence, the need for a governmental and grassroots socialist intervention vis-à-vis new creative legislation for IP and the public domain and a greater dedication to the sharing economy by artists via creative commons licensing.

La Industria Cultural combines the capitalist fat cat, the dollar bills that are also ubiquitous in Alonso's photomontage repertoire, with a Sevillian landmark, the Giralda.¹³ The city's famous bell tower, frequented by

¹³ The Giralda has been an iconic structure for Seville stretching back for nearly a

thousands of tourists each year, is incarnated here as a lady of pleasure, referencing the prostitution of local culture.¹⁴ *La casa común*, by Miguel Brieva, is a utopian depiction of a communal approach to culture, health, education, work, etc. At the very top level, where the brain would be in this anthropomorphic structure, is

millennium. Construction on the tower was begun in 1184 and completed in 1198, prior to the *reconquista* of Seville. Initially a minaret, the building would be converted as part of the Cathedral of Seville after the city was captured by Christian soldiers in 1248. Although the structure was damaged during a 1356 earthquake, by the beginning of the fifteenth century it was rebuilt as a bell tower alongside a cathedral which was one of the largest churches in the world at the time.

¹⁴ «Turista ven a Sevilla», the first track of the 2013 Pony Bravo album *De palmas y cacería*, reiterates this sentiment «turista te queremos/ tu traes el dinero» as it laments the loss of *encanto* and authenticity. The «lugar ideal» described by Alonso is a simulacra and counterfeit reality, a kind of hyperreality (Eco, 1986) in which «cada sevillano es turista».

the «cultura procomún», culture as a public good, which is anchored by Creative Commons (CC).

The massification and commodification of art has exploited and erased the aura from contemporary culture, making it ubiquitous and valueless. Meanwhile the same global capitalist system seeks to legally and eternally protect both the auratic and the nonauratic as intellectual property, making these limited and dear. For indie, the auratic will always be the live event, but it need not be archived and hoarded as subcultural capital. Daniel Alonso and Pony Bravo have frequently publicly pushed for open culture, for remixing, for the mashup, for the collage and photomontage to keep this aura alive in the present as one would sustain and pass on the bacterial culture of a sourdough. It is a call to renew a vital shared folk culture, to carry on the traditions that have been passed down to them as flamenco, as blues, as reggae, to revert to the relative anonymity of the creator and the consecration of the creation. Instead of a past object that is fetishized and hoarded for economic or cultural capital by the individual investor, it is a vibrant present culture —communally owned, elaborated, and celebrated. Instead of «I was there», it is «we are here».

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