Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana

by

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We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard

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Abstract

Composing collectivity is a visual ethnography that explores musical performance in Havana, using experimental techniques to create a convergence of art, documentary and ethnography. In Cuba music is a way of life, a collective practice and a defining symbol of culture and identity, but also an intriguing example of intercultural performance: performances that incorporate multicultural influences as a component of artistic creation. This research not only explores new understandings of cultural hybridity and intercultural performance, but also encourages consideration of the role of artistic freedom, experimentation and innovation within the visual ethnographic paradigm. The film and accompanying essay exemplify Cuban music not only as a positive artistic outcome of intercultural exchange, but also the ways in which different film styles can be used to explore society and culture within ethnographic research.

Keywords: Havana, Cuba, music, performance, hybridity, visual ethnography
Introduction

Intercultural performances, loosely defined as performances that incorporate multicultural influences as a component of artistic creation (Chang, 2010), emerge out of globalizing processes (Schechner & Brady, 2013). This study has examined music-centered intercultural performances in Cuba, within a broader background comprising of globalizing, post-colonizing, and post-imperial processes. In Cuba music is a way of life, a collective practice and a defining symbol of Cuban culture and national identity (Chambers, 2007), but also an intriguing example of intercultural performance. As musical choices are cultural choices (Kotarba & Vannini, 2009), the intercultural performance and consumption of music serves as a unique expression of national and cultural aspirations and ideals (Boer et al., 2013), but also hybrid and globalizing forces.

The hybrid nature of Cuban music epitomizes Schechner and Brady’s (2013) concept of “integrative interculturalism”: the idea that people from different cultures can not only work together successfully, but also harmonize different aesthetic, social, and belief systems, creating fusions or hybrids that are whole and unified (p. 308). Integrative interculturalism is not a case of one culture or performance genre overwhelming others, but of something new evolving out of mutual respect and reciprocity (Schechner & Brady, 2013). Examining Cuban music as an example of integrative interculturalism can demonstrate how influences of
globalization that are often criticized as being negative can actually be positive, promoting integration and removal of intercultural barriers (Doku & Asante, 2011).

How can the hybrid nature of Cuban music and culture be explored to more thoroughly understand the significance of intercultural performance? To answer this question, my research has drawn from studies of intercultural performance (Chang, 2010; Martin, 2004; Schechner & Brady, 2013), exploring its significance through the presence of cultural hybridity (Kraidy, 2002; Schechner & Brady, 2013) in Cuban music (Chambers, 2007; Finn, 2009; Hansing, 2001; Manuel, 2009; Moore, 2006; Thomas, 2010; Washburne, 2001). Theoretically, the study has drawn from foundations of Doku & Asante’s (2011) studies of globalization and culture, Carroll’s (2007) research on globalization and artistic practice, and performance studies (Schechner & Brady, 2013).

The goal of this research is to consider cultural hybridity through the exploration of Cuban music, allowing me to challenge negative conceptions of “impurity” or “mixing” as a result of globalization (Schechner & Brady, 2013, p. 263). As a direct consequence of the world increasingly becoming a place where distant cultures meet and mix freely, performance arts have become enriched, reflecting the diverse societies in which we live (Martin, 2004). Intercultural performance examined through the concept of hybridity can be seen as a positive outcome of this reality. I have demonstrated this by producing a visual ethnography, and more
Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana

precisely a combination of documentary film and written article composed of imagery and reflections on Cuban musical performance and daily life.

**Framework**

I have explored Cuban music using visual ethnography (Berg, 2008; Henley, 2000; O’Reilly, 2009; Pink, 2011) to study hybridity and more specifically intercultural performance. Ethnography seeks to explore and understand cultural phenomena through an emphasis on subjects’ frame of reference and understandings of the world (Singer, 2009). Ethnographic methods are invaluable for understanding contemporary phenomena as they allow for the collection of data that would be unattainable through other modes of enquiry, producing findings that are “vivid, dynamic and processual portrayals of lived experience” (Smith, 2007, p. 229).

Capturing subject matter through a multisensory paradigm is essential in understanding society and culture (Pink, 2011). Within a multisensory framework, the audio-visual mode of ethnography is becoming more important, as the development of the field of visual ethnography has raised awareness of the importance of the audio-visual in cultural (re)production, analysis, and representation (O’Reilly, 2009). Though ethnographers have traditionally favored verbal and written information, every culture is composed of countless nonverbal images and symbols that are often not reducible to the favored approach of self-reports and text (Berg, 2008). Applications of visual ethnography have developed as an effective means for recording, documenting, and explaining social worlds and
understandings of people and culture using an audio-visual framework (Berg, 2008).

**Method of Data Collection**

I have collected data through ethnographic fieldwork, whereby I have obtained audio and visual recordings of musical performances in order to explore Cuban music as an intercultural performance. I have answered my research question through a gradual process of discovery and observation, engaging subjects within their everyday lives rather than placing them within predetermined circumstances (Henley, 2000). The research has explored the subject matter by creating a documentary film that takes inspiration from observational (Bonner, 2013; Grimshaw & Tavetz, 2009; Nichols, 2010), reflexive and poetic traditions (Bonner, 2013; Nichols, 2010), resulting in a film mode best described as experimental documentary. As experimental style is not yet a common documentary mode, this project proposes the experimental mode as an important addition to visual ethnography.

I have captured imagery through observation, gathering footage by spending time in and around Havana in a non-participatory manner. Footage gathered consists of a variety of Cuban musical performances both on the street and at performance venues such the Callejón de Hamel, Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, and La Zorra y El Cuervo. The reflexive traditional essay accompanies the video to provide context to the research and process.
Data Analysis

I have used public ethnography (Tedlock, 2007; Vannini, 2013) techniques in the analysis of this research. Public ethnography is ethnographic research intended for a public audience, allowing for greater exposure that deviates from the traditional book and journal article that many ethnographers rely on (Vannini, 2013). Analyzing data in a way that aims to make research more publicly accessible requires the researcher to investigate platforms that reach a wider audience, transcending typical academic expectations (Jones, 2012). To achieve this I have produced a nine-minute visual ethnography, with the intention of utilizing social media, online media platforms and film festivals to make this research publicly accessible.

The video produced for this research is interpretive in nature, producing evocations of music and life in Cuba through juxtaposition of imagery and audio. Through the use of film and juxtaposition new meanings can be drawn from the subject matter (Henley, 2000). Inspired by observational style, the research is presented in a way that invites individual interpretation, instead of the filmmaker fully controlling and/or creating the meaning of the film (Bonner, 2013). Drawing from the poetic mode, the film attempts to create an experience of Cuban music for the audience (Bonner, 2013), and uses the reflexive mode to create a process of engagement between the viewer and filmmaker (Nichols, 2010). The film's presentation explores the concept of artistic formats in ethnography (Rutten,
Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana

Dlenderen, & Soetaert, 2013) and the potential of visual experimental practice within art-anthropology-ethnography collaborations (Schneider, 2008). The resulting film style is one best described as “experimental documentary”: a distinctly unique film mode created through artistic ingenuity, experimentation and incorporation of multiple styles, resulting in an individual, interpretive and thoroughly unique production. The film aims to evoke a lived experience of Cuban music, enabling the viewer to observe, interpret and consider the significance of intercultural performance through artistic representation.

Composing Collectivity: Producing a visual ethnography in Havana

I began this project with a conscious reflection of the challenges of representation that inevitably face filmmakers attempting to bridge the (arguable) divide between documentary film and ethnography. This process was largely characterized by my belief in the artistic nature of filmmaking, provoking extensive consideration of the place of artistic expression and challenges of representation in the production of a visual ethnography. The differences between ethnographic and documentary film are often blurred (Jacobs, 2013), and to a degree depend on choice of style. Of Nichols (2010) six documentary film modes, at least three (observational, participatory, and reflexive) can be said to originate from ethnographic methodologies (Jacobs, 2013). In this project, I have drawn from two of these traditional styles (observational and reflexive) and two emerging styles (poetic and experimental) to create a visual and auditory representation of my experience as an
Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana

ethnographic tourist in Havana. The result is a visual music composition exploring the hybrid nature of Cuban music as globally significant performance.

**Equipment, method and style in a visual medium**

This project began with the intention of solely utilizing observational film style. The goal of observational cinema is to show the viewer what occurred in front of the lens without manipulation, with the editing process used to shape the material into a coherent picture (Bonner, 2013). The filmmaker is concerned with what might be considered unremarkable, neglected, and the everyday, rendering the film not as an object of scrutiny but as a space to be opened up by seer and seen (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). The filming process drew from this methodology, in its intention of locating and observing locally significant performances in Havana. The filming process relative to the observational tradition is well described by Taussig’s (1993) descriptive process (as cited in Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009), where the placement of the camera is determined by skill, judgment, and a sensibility that is shaped both by knowledge and spontaneous response to what is happening in the moment.

The production utilized guerrilla filmmaking techniques, a form of independent filmmaking characterized by low budgets, skeleton crews and simple equipment. Performances were filmed on a Cannon D5 Mark 2 camera in 1080p full frame HD at 24 frames per second, a camera chosen for its portability, technical capability and its full range of manual options. Using a single lens reflex (SLR)
camera, which is designed for still photography, instead of a larger and more
standard broadcast camera has the added advantage of being inconspicuous, making
it easier for people to act normally around the camera. The camera also has
advantages in mobility, permitting a more immersive experience in the filmmaker’s
surroundings. An EF 24-105 Lens was used, the desired result being video images
that have a cinematic look of film, a conscious choice regarding the artistic direction
of the project. The lens allowed for the use of deep-focus photography characteristic
of observational cinema, though the film evolved to deviate from such tradition in
rejection of long takes and extended sequences (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). This
particular lens also has an advanced image stabilizer, which was important in that
the performance events being filmed did not often allow for effective tripod use;
shooting locations were often crowded and many performances could be described
as omnipresent in nature, with the stage (or absence of one) being only a singular
focal point of an experience that surrounds and immerses the observer. Therefore
setting up a tripod and remaining stationary with the intention of gathering long,
uninterrupted shots (as is the observational style) would result in footage that could
not sufficiently re-create experience in the film. Using a locked-off tripod can also
limit the ability for creative shot decisions, unless one is filming in an environment
that allows for extensive free movement, which I was not. Here it is important to
clarify that I do not always advocate for freehand filming; I maintain that steady
shots are largely crucial to the quality and professionalism of a production.
However if the camera operator is experienced in freehand filming, has a quality lens stabilizer as well as access to an editing program that has additional stabilization capability, it is possible to produce a film using freehand videography without it effecting the quality of the film. It should be noted that to employ this method a filmmaker would need to be experienced and comfortable with freehand camerawork, and possess the ability to edit the footage in a way that works around the challenges that this technique inevitably creates (or have the ability to hire someone who does). Here is the turning point of where I realized that observational film style is too limited for my production; using freehand videography in conjunction with a camera that allows for a full range of manual controls (which require adjustment periodically for exposure, focus etc.) make long takes impossible and extensive editing necessary. Capturing performances creatively, navigating the challenges of an individual freehand shoots, and presenting the material in a way that portrays my own recollection of events through creative choices (e.g. quick cuts, slow motion, montage, soft edits etc.) resulted in the rejection of the observational tradition in favor of artistic freedom.

**Artistic freedom and expression**

Contemplating artistic freedom became quickly problematic while working solely within observational cinema tradition. Though Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) discuss the use of observational techniques to open a space between art and anthropology, observational film traditionally requires the filmmaker to observe
what is happening without interfering, editing to shape the material in to a coherent picture with little interference (Bonner, 2013). Though my original intention was to produce this film purely within observational tradition, the experience of Cuban performance is not one that I believe is best captured solely through observational methodology, for reasons outlined above. Moving beyond the limitations of observational cinema, I began to draw inspiration from Nichols (2010) poetic documentary mode, which aims to evoke the nature of an experience (Bonner, 2013). I also added a written narrative to the film, drawing from Nichols (2010) reflexive mode, in which a documentary reveals or features the filmmakers process, not by showing the filmmaker on camera, but by making their construction of the film a key component (Bonner, 2013).

Exploring music in Cuba is an experience like no other, and I have aimed to evoke the unique nature of the experience through utilization of non-traditional stylistic choices. “It is performance...that interprets music, at least as much as, and probably more than, the acts of reading, discussing and writing about texts” (Smith, 2001, pg. 619 as cited in Finn, 2009). Therefore in the film I have attempted to let the musical performances artistically speak for themselves, with the accompanying narrative providing poetic contextualization and intellectual cohesion to the production, but inviting interpretations that reach beyond my own experience. The resulting experimental documentary provokes further consideration of the place of artistic representation within visual ethnographic research.
Artistic representation in visual ethnography

The intention of creating a film which best evokes my experiences in Havana led me the contemplation of artistic presence and representations in ethnography. There is an increasing amount of literature concerning the relationship between art, anthropology and ethnography, stretching back to the early phases of the modern discipline (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009; Pink, 2009; Schneider, 2008). Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) discuss the natural inclination of filmmakers to explore anthropologies’ convergences with artistic practice:

*These convergences include a shared concern with "the real", an attention to and mining of the everyday, an interest in the transformative possibilities of the mundane, the careful siting of work and considered engagement with the viewer, and a commitment to interrogating the formal possibilities of the medium – as seen in the deliberate play with the look, the framing, the sound, and the tempo of the work. (pg. 156)*

Today both artists and anthropologists are introducing ethnographic formats in art, and artistic formats in ethnography (Rutten, Dienderen, & Soetaert, 2013). I have found my exploration of Cuban musical performance well suited to furthering consideration of the potential of artistic representation within visual ethnography. In a desire to produce a film that evokes my experience in Havana, it became apparent that my vision could not be conveyed through any currently established documentary category, with three modes that inspired my vision (observational,
Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana

poetic and reflexive) being theoretically incompatible. It also became apparent that there is a need within documentary film, particularly in its convergence with ethnography, for a genre that supports artistically inspired creativity, innovation and experimentation.

Over the last twenty years, notions of “experimental anthropology” or “experimental ethnography” have increasingly emerged, demonstrating efforts and need to push beyond the established conventions of anthropological representation (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, pg. 159). Ingold (2008) has proposed “exploratory knowledge practices” as a framework for approaching art and anthropology as deeply social endeavors (as cited in Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). In his (2008) research, Schneider considers new possibilities of experimentation in visual research and representation, calling for new engagement with visual forms of research and representation beyond the sub-disciplinary confines of visual anthropology, stressing the importance of dialogue with the arts. Innovation in ethnographic film remains confined in the traditional paradigm of visual research (Grimshaw, 2001), and hardly any filmmakers have engaged with the possibilities of film as explored by experimental filmmakers and visual artists (Schneider, 2008). Future art-anthropology-ethnography collaborations should start addressing the unfulfilled potential of visual experimentation to overcome the still dominant narrative paradigm among visual practitioners (Schneider, 2008).

A new mode: Experimental Documentary
Within the independent film world, experimental film is already a widely accepted style, being an established category in professional and student film festivals throughout the world. This established experimental style is not focused within the documentary genre, instead being an all-encompassing category for filmmakers to push the boundaries of all acceptable film styles. This allows for an outlet of individual creativity and interpretation, provoking new insight to the ways in which film can affect an audience. Being immersed in Havana’s musical scene inspired me to imagine ways in which experimentation within visual ethnography could produce and encourage new ways of knowing, learning and representing culture within the visual ethnographic paradigm.

I propose the addition of an experimental documentary mode to the traditional list of documentary film modes. Such addition would give documentary filmmakers a platform upon which individual creativity could be utilized, provoking new forms of expression, opening new possibilities for interpretation and encouraging new potential for knowledge and experience evoked through film. An experimental mode could allow for wider and more accepted exploration of the relation between artistic and ethnographic practice. Within this context, I am using Schneider’s (2008) meaning of “art” as visual arts in the widest sense (including film, video, photography and installation) and “ethnography”, the method of fieldwork that continues to define a core of social and cultural research (Schneider, 2008, pg. 171). Encouraging experimentation in the joining of these two practices
would push the limitations of both these disciplines, and serve as a starting point for the creation of new genres, practices and styles that could emerge from the process of experimentation.

Experimental style is ideal for ethnographic researchers that want to utilize visual media in their research but may be limited by their capacity to produce a full-scale film production. Professional film productions are incredibly costly, require a full professional crew and equipment, and, due to the well-established hierarchal structure of production, can limit the creative control of the filmmaker. Therefore experimental methods within ethnography could allow researchers to design production processes that best suite research subjectively, rather than being bound by pre-set and expected standards. Though deviation from film industry production standards may sometimes result in a lack of film quality, experimental documentary mode is more sympathetic to technical limitation, instead placing importance on content, creativity and conveyance of the subject matter.

The visual ethnography produced for this thesis exemplifies a singular example of an experimental documentary production, my process outlined as follows: 1) Extensively researching and investigating a certain phenomenon within the visual ethnographic paradigm; 2) Creating a production strategy; 3) Immersing myself in said phenomenon and capturing this experience through visual and auditory technology; 4) Compiling and analyzing the data collected through this process; 5) Editing it so that I feel my experience and knowledge is represented
through film; and 5) Projecting this experience so that others can see and interpret it. The result of this process is a film that I classify as an experimental documentary, characterized by the artistic presentation of the subject matter, stylistic choices that reflect individual creativity, the exploration of phenomenon through visual and auditory technology, and a resulting film style that does not fit in to a single previously established category.

Contextualizing Cultural Hybridity: Cuban music as Intercultural Performance

Hybridity is a concept that has become rampantly discussed across many spheres of cultural research, theory, and criticism, and is one of the most widely used and criticized concepts in postcolonial theory (Kraidy, 2002). Instead of focusing on such criticisms, this research considers hybridity as a positive outcome of globalizing processes, which allow cultures to come together and influence others in a positive way, as is outlined by Schechner’s (2013) theory of integrative interculturalism. Integrative interculturalism is not a case of one culture or performance genre overwhelming others, but of something new evolving out of mutual respect and reciprocity (Schechner, 2013). Cultural and artistic exchanges that result in hybridization are not a recent phenomenon; throughout history within artistic practice we find that wherever there is intercultural contact, cultures have a significant influence over others (Carroll, 2007). Considering artistic practice as a platform for conceptualizing hybridity makes Cuban music an excellent study in the
exploration of the positive cultural expression that can arise from hybrid and globalizing forces.

The natural tendency of humankind is promiscuity, continuously resulting in ever-changing diversity; conceptualizing hybridity through performance studies contributes to the ongoing work of exploring, understanding, promoting and enjoying this diversity (Schechner, 2013). Intercultural performances studied within the broader context of hybridity can demonstrate a clear picture of the potentially positive outcomes that arise from a world where cultures frequently meet and influence others. In Havana, Cuba, musicians negotiate their increasingly transnational identities through musical representation (Thomas, 2010). The visual ethnography produced for this research was filmed over the course of two weeks spent in Havana as an ethnographic tourist, considering the positive implications of cultural hybridity through the exploration of Cuban music as intercultural performance. It is hoped that my experiences in Havana can not only provide a unique picture of Cuban music and culture, but also demonstrate the wonderful artistic outcomes that can arise from an increasingly interconnected world.

**Traditional Afro-Cuban: The Callejon de Hamel**

Afro-cubans have perpetuated musical tradition originally brought by their descendants from Africa, developing new hybrid styles by fusing elements from their past with the practices of their colonial masters (Moore, 2006). Since the mid-nineteenth century, virtually all innovations in Cuban music have come from the
Afrocuban community (Moore, 2006). The Callejon de Hamel is a remarkably unique performance venue located within a single street in Central Havana. Entering is like walking in to an evocation of the African heritage that is such an integral component of Cuban culture. What was once an unremarkable rundown alley in one of the most desolate municipalities of Havana in is now an enchanting tribute to African ancestry and Cuban intercultural performance.

Arriving at the Callejon, I met a Cuban woman named Adella, a tall striking woman of African decent dressed head to toe in pink with a headscarf to match. Adella took it upon herself to give me a personal tour of the the Callejon de Hamel, and soon I was enlightened to understand the area as not only a fascinating display of Afro-Cuban heritage but also an enchanting celebration of Cuban art; the area is entirely the vision of Cuban artist Salvador Gonzalez Escalona. His creations include the brightly colored murals covering the walls depicting ancient gods and elemental forces, and the intricate sculptures made from recycled materials such as bathtubs, hand pumps and pinwheels. This artwork is featured in the film’s introduction, which attempts to convey the unique artistic brilliance of the venue and the energy of the locals, who, like Adella, gather here on a weekly basis to celebrate their heritage in musical tribute.

The performance began with the performers weaving through the crowded alley singing and chanting with no instrumental accompaniment until they arrive onstage, where rhumba announces its arrival with sudden entry of hypnotic
Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana

drumming and captivating vocals. Dancers grace the stage in flashes of color and movement, and the rhythms carry across the crowd as if trying to transport them to another place and time. Observing the locals watch the performance was to watch an audience become a part of the performance itself. Singing along, dancing, chanting, I began to feel like I was at a place of worship, watching participants call to forces unseen by the eyes but felt by the senses. The experience very much resembles the way it is edited together in the film: instantly drawn in by the artistic imagery that defines the performance space; the performers entrance subtly but instantly demanding respect and attention; and the performance itself, such a feast for the senses that I left with not a complete picture of the performance in its entirety, but a montage comprised of flashes and fragments of experience.

Cuban folk music: The Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba

A center of folkloric drumming and dance, the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional’s (CFN) mandate outlines the intention of rescuing and preserving Cuban folk dance performances and musical roots. Founded in 1964, it was the first revolutionary institution exclusively devoted to performances of national folklore (Hagedorn, 1995, as cited in Moore, 2006). The CFN is an excellent Cuban intercultural performance venue, where “songs from Santeria ceremony might appear next to ballroom contradanza, turn-of-the-century coros de clave y guaguancó, Spanish derived música guajira traditions, Haitian-derived folklore from eastern Cuba, and/or carnival music (Moore, 2006, pg. 15).
The Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba is hidden in the Havana suburb of Vedado, where the performances take place on the backyard patio of a large old house with bright green chipping paint, a wrap around driveway and overgrown gardens. Upon arrival the only giveaway to the building’s true nature was the small rusted plaque by the front door and the Santeria priest, characterized by his all-white dress, making conversation and welcoming visitors. Walking through the side gate I entered the open-air performance space, where locals (and a very small minority of tourists) come to spend their Saturday evening being immersed in the rhythms and melodies of folk performance.

As the heat of the day faded to the coolness and light of the early evening, two bands took the stage for a two-hour show. It was a relaxed atmosphere where one could not listen to the music without being drawn in to the rhythms that so obviously move the performers in both a literal and figurative sense. This sense of deep connection and love of music was infectious; throughout the performance, various members of the audience got up and started dancing in the performance area (in the film note the old lady dancing in the background throughout the performance). The energy drew me in from the moment the vocalists took the stage, striking me not only as a significant intercultural performance but also a reminder of the ways in which music can work as an effective tool in social organization, socialization and community formation across cultures (Kotarba & Vannini, 2009).

A European-Cuban hybrid: The Contradanza
The street performances featured in the project embody two drastically different styles of the hybrid nature of Cuban music. The first is a street performance featuring contradanza music. The contradanza (also known as the Habanera outside of Cuba) was the most popular and characteristically Cuban music of the nineteenth century (Manuel, 2009). In an era of growing Cuban nationalism, it was an original synthesis of European melody and Afro-Cuban rhythms (Manuel, 2009). The contradanza was composed and performed by both whites and people of color, and danced by enthusiasts of all racial backgrounds often in contexts designed for intermingling (Manuel, 2009).

I experienced the contradanza tradition of cultural intermingling as a notable intercultural performance on the streets of Havana. Walking along Prado Street I came across the band set up in the middle of the streets wide division, which serves as a place for locals to meet, kids to play and, apparently, performers to perform. The band’s traditional melody wafted through the air, drawing a modest audience from the surrounding streets. In front of the approximately ten member band there were a small cluster of older couples dancing; I remain unsure whether they were there as a planned part of the band’s performance for aesthetic appeal, or if the band regularly plays there and the couples come to dance in tribute to the nostalgic tradition of the music.

This section of the film features mainly the dancers, projecting the way they captured my attention for the duration of the performance, while my ears feasted on
the sounds of the band playing in the background. These dancers thoroughly embodied Thomas’ (2010) description of Havana as a “site for the construction of nostalgia” (Pg. 228), as well as Manuel’s (2009) descriptions of the musical style being one enjoyed and comprised of the hybrid composition of Cuban culture. The intercultural nature of the performance was embodied within both of these aspects of the performance.

**The roots of modern Jazz: La Zorra y El Cuervo**

La Zorra y El Cuervo is one of the most established jazz venues in Cuba. Located near the Plaza de la Revolución across the street from the famous Hotel Nacional de Cuba, the club originated well before 1959 and has been established as a jazz club since the late 1990s. Jazz music is historically rooted in cross-cultural exchanges between Cuba, Latin America and the United States, dating back to Cuban musical influence in New York in the mid-twentieth century (Washburne, 2001). It is through this historical relationship that Cuban jazz is an intercultural performance.

The hybrid nature of both the music and the club itself were apparent the moment I arrived at the club’s entrance, which consisted of an old British style red phone booth leading to a steep dark staircase into the underground performance space. Entering the area, I felt as though I could be at a jazz club anywhere in the world; the room was dark with soft red lighting and pictures of late-great musicians adorning the walls. A classic wood bar lined the back of the small and intimate
space, and the small tables looked towards the slightly raised stage. Live performances commence here nearly every night at 11:00pm.

The band playing in the film is called Balance, consisting of a saxophonist, pianist, bass player and drummer. I was lost in the band’s rhythms until 2:00am, when their set ended. Sitting and listening as fast-paced jazz transitioned into a soulful ballad, the music began to conjure imagery of Havana, evoking nostalgic reflections that come to define the city as a place like no other. This experience is recreated in the film, with a montage of imagery evoking the nostalgic atmosphere of the city juxtaposed with the performance experience.

**An intercultural trend: Rastafari**

The second street performance featured in the film is Rastafari, a genre far removed from the traditional contradanza and selected to demonstrate the range of Havana’s intercultural performances. Since its inception in the 1930s the Jamaican Rastafari movement has gained an international following as one of the leading Afro-Caribbean religions and one of the world’s most popular intercultural trends (Hansing, 2001). In Cuba different components of this culture have been selectively and randomly copied, altered, added onto and fused with elements from other cultural systems (Hansing, 2001), making Rastafari performance in Cuba distinctly intercultural in nature.

Decades after its original birth and “tour du monde”, Rastafari has surpassed geo-political, linguistic and ideological boundaries to become adapted, redefined
and even reinvented in Cuba according to their own particular context and circumstances (Hansing, 2001, pg. 734). I happened across a musical example of this hybrid reinvention while wandering through Old Havana. The performance was instantly recognizable as Rastafari not only in sound, but also in the distinctively colored hat worn by the guitarist. The performance was instantly captivating, the simplistic joy apparent in the young man and woman’s style and demeanor. This simplicity brought out the stylistic ingenuity of the percussion instruments used, complimenting the vocals, whistling and guitar, which carried a fresh and unique melody.

The nature of Rastafari’s transnational journey and ideological influence in Cuba (Hansing, 2001) seems a suiting conclusion to the film performances, a tribute to the remarkably diverse variety of multicultural influences that compose the hybrid nature of Cuban music. Conveying overlapping issues of race, religion, youth culture, socialism and transnationalism, the performance can be viewed not only as a meaningful intercultural performance but also as a jumping off point for the consideration of Cuba’s period of economic crises and intense social transformation (Hansing, 2001). The style demonstrates how considering hybridity and more specifically intercultural performance can encourage deeper understanding of cultural phenomenon and the social forces that drive them.

**Conclusion**
Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana has aimed to push the current boundaries of performance studies and the ways that social research can be conducted and projected. The resulting visual ethnography, an artistic projection of my personal experiences of Cuban music and culture, has attempted to explore and demonstrate new ways that film can be utilized within ethnographic research. The written reflection provides context to the research, conveys the potential and advantages of using multisensory methodologies, and discusses the need for ethnographers to further explore convergences between art and ethnography. This research has provided insight to the significance of intercultural performance through exploring the hybrid nature of Cuban musical performance, exemplifying Cuban music as a positive artistic outcome of intercultural exchanges that emerge from globalizing processes. It is hoped that this research succeeds not only in provoking new understandings of cultural hybridity and intercultural performance, but also the ways in which different film styles can be used to explore society and culture within ethnographic research.
References


Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana


Composing Collectivity: Exploring musical performance in Havana


