How do you describe Bazuco? What is this project about?

Bazuco is a media company based in Bogota, with cells in Venezuela, the United States and the Netherlands. Although Bazuco is a unit based in the tradition of performance art, it also plays with the production of popular media (radio, music and video) and commercial products (books, cds, skateboards, shirts). The idea, basically, was to create a brand that represented an "international idea" coming from a context seen as "underdeveloped" or "Third World", as is contemporary Colombia.

Who are the members?(Please specify name, profession and studies of each member)

Juan Obando. Director / Graphic / Music Manager. Bogotá.
Industrial Design BA / Minor in Architecture and Urbanism. Universidad de los Andes.
Master of Fine Arts. Purdue University.
Currently working as a visual artist and Instructor in the Department of Art and Design at Purdue University.
I'm the drummer for Drum Kit (also part of Bazuco) in USA.
www.juanobando.com

Juan Carlos Ospina. Director / Web / Media Manager. Bogotá.
Graphic design. Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano
Currently works as a freelance web developer in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Daniel Clavijo. Editor / Public Relations. Bogotá
Social Communication. Universidad de La Sabana
Currently works as editor at a translation agency and also as freelance copyeditor in Bogotá. Plays guitar for Independiente 81.

Juan Esteban Rios. Arranger / Musician / publicist. Bogotá.
Industrial Design. Universidad Javeriana.
Master in Humanitarian Design and Sustainable Living. Design Academy Eindhoven
Currently works as a developer of mobile applications for Nimbuzz in the Netherlands.

How do you manage this project from many different cities?

Internet. Definitely, there is no way to operate in the way we do without the Internet. All with great patience, emails from here to there. Using online text-editing tools. Servers to send and receive files and all these applications called Web 2.0 are essential to the functioning of Bazuco.

How did you get the idea?

Actually, there was not much argumentation when we started. At first,

we wanted to simply sell some t-shirts, we had no budget to put up a real media campaign, we resorted to street marketing basics, such as stickers and graffiti. Then, we abandoned the idea of "creating fashion", just out of simple lack of interest and market saturation. Even so, we remained with the webpage and lots of stickers. At that point we started to get some media attention (alternative and mass), and always got a kind of negative reaction to the fact that we were not selling anything and did not belong to any of those graffitti rebel-gangs. Like, there was some sort of disappointment at not finding in us the next Che Guevara. It personally made me think about how there wasn't, at that time in Colombia, a media outlet that (re)presented the cultural reality of the youth of Bogotá. There was, of course , an over-romanticization of the urban phenomenon, where the "new alternative media" portrayed any weekend gang thug as "local cultural producer." That, together with the "extreme culture" local campaign (a massive year-after-year campaign run by the city of Bogotá) and the opressive inclusion of the "rock discourse" as part of the local policies for the youth, had ended up flattening youth culture in Bogota, almost in its entirety. Practically, you had to have spray paint, a mohawk, or some subcultural costume to be recognized as "young," as a participant in the configuration of the "urban / contemporary" in Bogota. To us, what we thought was more interesting about that situation, was that all these attitudes, processes and dynamics were verbatim copies of first world trends transmitted via iPod, MTV and Rolling Stone. Still, their presentation in the media ranged from "unique" and "original" to "contestatary" and, especially, "local". Which they weren't really all that much. The acquisition of those cultural models happens online or at malls and not in the streets of downtown Bogota. It seemed to us more interesting, entertaining, and honest, to portray and embrace that commercial/cultural environment than to put on a show based in the romanticization of "the streets."

So we began. Heavily influenced by bands like Public Image Ltd and ABC or things like the Japanese art company Maywa Denki and the Slovenian NSK. Using media tools that made their first appearance in the "scene." The first thing we created was a performance radio show (as a podcast) in which, basically, we made fun at all this youth movements and, incidentally, gave ourselves free rein to our antics. There was, at the time (and still), a worrisome shortage of humor and self-critique in the Colombian media. I believe that with the murder of Jaime Garzón (Colombia's biggest political humorist) it was achieved to put an end to humor in Colombia. In 2006, almost nobody had the courage, or audacity, to offer a critical and humorous look at everything that showed young cultural creation as wonderful, unique and original. Obviously enough, there were death threats and personal pursuits (ironically, coming from the "extremely tolerant" and "liberal" youth). Then, after that, things went off to many sides, and we started doing live events, videos, music, and even went back to sell branded merchandise.

What do you think are the challenges when starting independent initiatives?

The main challenge is to get off of that cloud of "being indie", I think. The media has created a cool, super-glamorous and totally false image of what independent cultural production is. That, as such, does not exist. All those bands you see in the "indie journals", posing, with makeup, with the

latest fashions, in reality don't live out of making music. Most members of these bands have office jobs, not very glamorous or very "rock and roll", with wich they pay their fashion bills. Still, the media shows them as rock stars, they put red carpets for them and create a "scene" in which they are "stars", when the reality is totally different. The reality for us was to make this a side project with a very close, artistically active and extremely critical, group of friends. The challenge, in fact, has been facing aggression and the solemn seriousness of the Colombian public, so opposed to self-criticism and new ideas. Even so, we are lucky enough to live in a global world in which we have found recognition and a wide open audience in countries as Venezuela, USA and The Netherlands.

What criteria do you use when choosing the bands that you support?

The bands we release and produce are with us simply because of friendship. And precisely for that reason, they do not fall within the generic stereotype of the Arena Rock Band or of the touristic pseudo-folk tropical music. We had the opportunity to work with very "outsider" musicians, people who don't intend to become rock stars with this, and that makes music as a therapy, something very cathartic. Most stuff we have released and presented comes in different forms and formats. They take risks because their life doesn't depend on being on the cover of Rolling Stone or being captured by the cameras of City TV. We have created the infrastructure for those who want access to what we create, can do it easily, and that has given these artists the freedom to experiment. So, we have things like detuned acoustic ballad with Los Famosos, pop punk with Independiente81 and Drum Kit, Electrodance with Las Ultrafabulosas and narcotropical mashup with the Dead druglords.

Why Bazuco?

Bazuco is just simply shocking, it sounded catchy. There was also at that time (2005) in Bogotá a strong preference for generic reggae music that seemed so curious. There were about 20 bands, all with the same sound and the same apology to marihuana. It seemed cool to do something with the word 'Bazuco' (Street word for "crack cocaine") which for us was a more explicit depiction of the reality of Bogota, than to try to pass as Rastafarians and "sing to cannabis". So when we began to bring the brand to other countries, the name, to some extent, took on another meaning. First of all, it is graphically strong and has some very nice type forms. Also, by omitting its meaning, the word is (for me) phonetically more attractive, so it stayed.

Why this rejection of what you call "Colombianiety"?

 Well, the truth is that there is not a strong rejection. Or maybe there is, I don't know. It depends on what one understands as what is "being Colombian". If there was, or there is, a rejection in what we do, is to these disgustingly sexist, violent and aggressive values that have been imposed as "ours". The verraquera, the colombian will, and all that bullshit are just pretty words to say ignorance and stubbornness, and to excuse an absurd tendency that is opposed to the integration of Colombia into a global discourse. Also, I personally believe that there is no Colombian culture as such, unless "culture" is understood as all of what the brand "Colombia is Passion" has made up and imposed as "Colombian." That 'vueltiao' hat, the president's poncho or "our geography" (which is something that was not built by us and yet we take credit for). On the other hand, it has not been rejection, actually. Moreover, that "Colombian identity" has been included in our discourse, as humor and comedic material. If you watch, for example, those "Colombia 2025" or "Colombia is Passion" videos (highly recommended), they are totally ridiculous and can be used to create endless humor out of them. It doesn't stop being depressing, of course, in light of their uncanny resemblance to the nationalist propaganda of the Third Reich in Germany and specially when we know that those Machiavellian characters, like the CEOs of "Colombia is passion" are those who impose the Colombian values, inside and outside the country, while lining their pockets with programs such as the fake Farm Aid and with the billions of dollars paid to them for this Colombian nationalist propaganda to exist and to be totally oppressive.

The fact that this machinery exists reveals the state of perennial ignorance and disinformation in which Colombians live. And that, definitely, will follow. We have no intention of any political or social "change". It is the continuation of these outdated dynamics what fuels our work. Then, rejection, as such, there is not much. There is, above all, an appropriation of this new "Colombian identity" in favor of comedy and performance.

What do you think of the rise of local bands that mix electronic music with Colombian folklore (ie, Bomba Estereo, Sidestepper, Systema Solar, Choc Quib Town)

Here I can not answer for everyone. I think they suck ass. That "boom" is totally tied to what we discussed in the previous question. There is a touristic imaginary already built, mostly by the "Colombia is passion" brand, which is like a Tropical-Walt Disney World version of Colombia, that has benefited such bands to increase their fame, which is fine. A tropipop band, like those, doesn't own the responsibility for social or political consciousness (even when presented as if they do). Their function is to make songs for people to sing, dance, get drunk and take drugs to, and to sell. And that's what they're are doing. Good for them. They have managed to synthetize, in a very efficient fashion, an entire national imaginary into a tropical cliché of "beach tourism" and 'good vibes', passing over hundreds of other folk rhythms offered by this geography (that must be equally as boring, anyway), making what's easiest and cheapest: providing first-world tourists an image of a Colombia where everywhere there's dancing, rumba, "cool" people and "bacanería", when the reality is different. The reality of coastal tourism in Colombia is a stinking pile of Israelis looking for cheap drugs and prostitutes, Asian businessmen looking for child prostitution and juvenile criminal gangs who kill tourists for digital cameras. Most of these modern tropipop bands consist of people from the inner cities, who have no idea whatsoever of the reality of the Colombian coast or its rhythms, they just suddenly got into this trend, apparently only to sell (at a very advanced age). If the idea is to talk about "what happens here," and about "our reality," instead of singing about rumba, fiesta, and the beach they would be singing about a student and a policeman kicking the shit out of each other while a Transmilenio bus runs them over to death.