

Music as Monument:
***Rock Nacional* and Memory in Post-Dictatorship Argentina**

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ABSTRACT

Music as Monument:

Rock Nacional and Memory in Post-Dictatorship Argentina

Jocelyn Parr

Military dictatorship was a too common feature of Argentine politics for much of the twentieth century. The most recent dictatorship (1976-1983) led by General Videla saw the disappearance of an estimated 30,000 Argentines. In the preceding decade, Argentina had been crippled by a civil war that raged between violent, Cuba-inspired guerrillas and the military.

It was in this violent context that Argentine rock music, the best of which was called *rock nacional*, appeared. Inspired by international rockers like The Beatles and by international student politics such as was seen in Paris in 1968, Argentina's first rockers were at once eager participants in an international rock scene and strident resisters to local violence. From 1965 to 1983, *rock nacional* went from being a subculture to mass culture. Imprinted in its history and in its most popular hits of that period are references to the violence that pervaded Argentine culture.

When dictatorship ended in 1983, Argentines turned to its atrophied judicial system to address the war crimes perpetrated in the previous seven years. However, with the military still a powerful force, 1980s governments bowed to military pressure and legislated impunity laws that destroyed any hopes of judicial retribution. Over a decade after the end of military rule, Argentines in the 1990s sought new means of atonement in commemoration.

With anniversaries of the coup coinciding with anniversaries of the first recordings of rock music, and with original *rockeros* like Charly García and León Gieco still garnering mass audiences, human rights organizations like *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* and Argentine governments turned to *rockeros* to animate memory of the dictatorship era. The symbiosis developed between *rockeros*, *Las Madres* and Argentine politicians has enabled a commemoration of the Dirty War which recalls only those who suffered at the hands of the military. Ignored in this commemoration are the systemic causes which led to the coup in the first place, guerrilla terrorism, and the uncomfortable fact that many Argentines benefited from the Dirty War era. This study of *rock nacional* and memory of dictatorship highlights the partisan selections that are being made and illustrates the problems with current commemorative projects in Argentina.

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This work is dedicated to my brother, Stephen, and our parents, Margot and Chris.

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Introduction

The traumatic event has its greatest and most clearly unjustifiable effect on the victim, but in different ways it also affects everyone who comes in contact with it: perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, resister, those born later.¹

In 1977, a year after the military coup that ousted then president Isabel Perón, third wife to Juan Perón, rock musician Luis Alberto Spinetta found himself in jail. Officially incarcerated for *averiguación de antecedentes*, or a criminal record check, his major infractions were not criminal but social: his long hair, his musical tastes, his *rockero* lifestyle and associated connotations (drug use, pacificism, and a rejection of the establishment). *Rockeros* like Spinetta all fit neatly within the rubric of the *joven sospechoso* (suspicious youth) that, in the military's eyes, posed a grave threat to the future of Argentina. In the prison's basement, in a dark cell, Spinetta says he looked up:

and [there] on the wall... was a lyric from one of my songs, "Cementerio club" ("Cemetery Club"). It was the most perverse paradox that fate had placed on me.²

Spinetta cried. He cried for the kid who wrote it, for a kid he did not know, for a kid whose fate would forever be a mystery. Had the young man, sure that he would die, quoted the song's first line, "Just when I thought of you, girl, I died."³ Or perhaps it was its penultimate: "How alone and sad I will be in this cemetery." Like many rock songs of

¹ Dominik LaCapra quoted in Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5-6.

² Luis Alberto Spinetta quoted in a 1985 interview by Pablo Vila in "Argentina's 'Rock Nacional': The Struggle for Meaning," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 10, no. 1 (Spring - Summer 1989), 15.

³ Luis Alberto Spinetta, "Cementerio Club," *Artaud*, 1973. All translations by the author, unless otherwise noted.

this era, Spinetta had captured the chaotic violence of 1970s Argentina and it had provided something— maybe solace, maybe will—to at least one imprisoned soul. When Argentine sociologist Pablo Vila recounted this anecdote in an article in 1989, he was linking Spinetta and Argentine rock to the dictatorial period in which it first developed. Since then, the link between *rock nacional* and memory of dictatorship has moved from the academy into popular culture. In this thesis, I argue that this shift is part of a greater trend in Argentine governmental and human rights discourse about dictatorship that considers circulating memory of dictatorship to be the most powerful tool in ensuring democratic future for the country. In incorporating *rock nacional* into this discourse Argentines have made numerous selections (one musician over another, one song over another), and these selections reveal a more systematic selection process that has privileged one set of victims over another and has ultimately simplified public memory of the Dirty War that saw victims and perpetrators in both military and terrorist groups.

For the sake of structuring such a broad examination of a complex music scene and its relation to a troubled political backdrop, I too have made selections. I have opted to focus on the careers of two of Argentina's most popular *rockeros*: Charly García and León Gieco. I justify this selection because García and Gieco offer stylistic bookends to a multivalenced genre of music that has been replete with contradictions, ambiguities and tensions throughout its history. Since both have had careers that have spanned nearly four decades—covering both the dictatorship era and democracy—their music and experiences offer a nuanced history of Argentine culture over this period. While the study of memory and rock music is the animating force behind this study, my foray into the history of *rock nacional* under dictatorship has armed me with a multifaceted

understanding of the history of the music and has permitted me to return to the contemporary commemorative scene and see it in more complex terms.

While rock music was undoubtedly replete with reference to the sinister context in which it arose, there is more that is interesting about this story. The governing question this thesis seeks to answer is this: in what ways did rock music produced during the 1970s reflect the dictatorial era, *and* to what use has this music been put in the post-dictatorship era in recalling that past? In addition to establishing a familiar narrative of music-as-resistance or youth-as-resistors, I explore the paradoxical ways these musicians constructed a national music that both resisted and repeated the cultural norms set out by the most recent dictatorship. The military junta knew the importance of culture and made very sophisticated attempts to alter, subvert, and even co-opt rock music that defied dictatorship as its practitioners sought pleasure and community and embraced both the music of the *pueblo* and that of First World rock stars and their attendant ‘hippie’ politics.

Rock music came to Argentina in the mid 1960s when General Onganía ruled as dictator. Onganía was ousted in 1969 following a violent episode in the city of Córdoba known as the Cordobazo; he was replaced by another military president who was replaced by another, amounting to a series of five *de facto* presidents between 1966 and 1973, when democracy briefly returned to Argentina. After three years of economic, civil, and political unrest, the military coup of 24 March 1976 inaugurated a further seven years of dictatorial rule which would reign over the worst human rights abuses ever seen in the country. The first Argentine generation of rockers rebelled against their oppressive environment and drew inspiration from symbols of youthful rebellion throughout the Western hemisphere.

British and American rock protested Vietnam, celebrated pacifism and new age spiritualism, ideals which were an anathema to the military generals who led Argentina almost uninterrupted from 1966-1983. Bands like *Arco Iris* [Rainbow], followed the post-White Album Beatles by keeping a spiritual advisor in their ranks.⁴ Multitudes of youth attended rock festivals modeled after Woodstock. Critics' loftiest praises never failed to ally Argentine stars with Northern counterparts. León Gieco, then a rising folk-rock star, was known as 'El Bob Dylan Argentino.' Serú Girán, García's first band, was often referred to in the 1970s as 'Los Beatles Argentinos.' These comparisons were fitting for the rising genre of *rock nacional* in the 1970s; but, within a decade, luminaries like Gieco, García, and Spinetta became omnipresent stars themselves. These men, and *rockeros* of the seventies were all men, are now veritable gods in the pantheon of Argentine cultural heroes.

In the 1970s, while some music critics lambasted popular music as being blindly acritical, a sub-genre developed within the rock music scene called *rock nacional*. It offered committed, consistent criticism of Argentina's increasingly bellicose society. Musicians nominated as icons of *rock nacional* were so named because audiences considered their message to be an authentic foil to commercial music, which failed to critique the attenuation of civil liberties under authoritarian rule. Despite the threats of censorship and exile, these musicians opted to narrate the impact of the Dirty War on Argentines by singing lyrics on stage that typically had to be altered or otherwise censored on recordings. Later generations of rock fans continued to value the

⁴ Prior to the 1968 recording of the White Album, the Beatles had traveled to India where they did transcendental meditation; for a time, the Beatles had a spiritual advisor named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, but the relationship was severed by the Beatles that year.

authenticity of so-called *músicos verdaderos* [real musicians], making early *rock nacional* icons like Charly García, León Gieco and Luis Alberto Spinetta the standard against which all other rockers would be judged. The music, stories, and performances of *rock nacional*'s icons have been canonized by museums, record companies, and national culture boards, and today are couched in the rhetoric of national treasures.

Embattled by dictatorship and in competition with other music scenes, like disco, the popularity of rock took a downward turn in the late 1970s, but it found its footing in 1980 when its popularity rose exponentially. Though always associated with youth, one of rock's central paradoxes, by the end of the 1980s, was its multigenerational audience and the age (typically over 35) of its superstars.⁵ Magazines were devoted to the genre, and national dailies started to include regular columns devoted to rock music in weekend editions of their newspapers. Biographies were written about icons like García and Gieco and, in large part as a result of the changing technology of compact discs, recording companies started to release multi-disc compilations. Despite receding hairlines and mid-life crises, original rockers like Gieco and García continue to attract huge audiences, and it is their ongoing popularity that has made them such pivotal figures in recalling the dictatorship era out of which they came.

Since the end of dictatorship in December of 1983, Argentine society has struggled to provide an adequate account for the past which would appease victims and their families without so delving into the systemic causes of civil unrest as far as to create irreparable chasms in society. In the 1980s, institutions such as the national courts and

⁵ Ramiro Martínez Mendoza, "El rock nacional y sus contradicciones ¿circo criollo del rocanrol?" Mario Margulis, ed., *La cultura de la noche: La vida nocturna de los jóvenes en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Espasa Hoy, 1994), 94-95.

government sponsored truth commissions were entrusted with the task of reparation and justice. However, by the close of the decade, these attempts had failed all levels of society and thus had failed to close the wounds left by dictatorship. Human rights groups first, and then government, turned to memory of dictatorship as a way of finding justice for victims. Like in many post-terror societies, the burgeoning study of memory has provided a way to humanize the historical past, providing on the one hand, a written record of past crimes, and on the other, a cathartic moment where testimony can finally be heard. Up until very recently, Argentines have had to rely upon memory to be an inadequate replacement for justice and the punishment of perpetrators.

To this day, the moral arbiters of memory of dictatorship are *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, women whose children had been disappeared by the military. Marching every Thursday afternoon in front of the *Casa Rosada*, the house of government, *Las Madres* publicly mourn the disappearance of some victims of the Dirty War. Not included in this group are the mothers of victims who had been killed by leftist political activists such as the radical *Montoneros* or the *Ejercito Republico del Pueblo* (ERP). Emerging in the 1960s, Argentine guerrillas built upon already established political networks such as the *Juventud Peronista* [Young Peronists] and modeled themselves after Cuba-inspired guerrilla networks that were escalating all over Latin America. By the early 1970s, the two reigning groups were the ERP and the *Montoneros*.⁶ Between 1969 and 1976, with a brief drop in 1973, guerrillas conducted about one violent

⁶ Structurally, these groups of urban guerrillas were very similar; where they differed was regarding Juan Perón, whom the *Montoneros* saw as a leader and whom the ERP saw as a false revolutionary. See Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The Dirty War in Argentina* (New York: Praeger Paperback, 2001), 42.

incident—be it a bombing, kidnapping, or assassination—per day.⁷ While guerrillas who perpetrated violent crimes would have most likely met retribution (constitutional or otherwise), the omission of this part of the current dictatorship narrative is problematic. To forget those killed by guerrillas and to overlook the vast networks they had established prior to the coup is to construct a simplistic narrative of the Argentine dictatorship which places all culpability at the hands of a sadistic military.

That rock music found its place in Argentine culture despite, or perhaps because of, dictatorial oppression has had a marked influence, in recent years, on two previously unconnected areas of study. Scholarship on memory of dictatorship and, as one writer has deemed it, *Rockología*, or the study of rock music, have begun to overlap.⁸ This scholarship echoes the way in the past decade, that journalists, museum curators, filmmakers, politicians, and artists have coupled the history of dictatorship and early *rock nacional*. When politicians call on the same rock musicians that human rights activists invite to their rallies, they are selecting cultural actors who are associated with seemingly non-partisan demands for justice and a selective memory of the past. In this thesis, I examine the consequences of these selections, illustrating the way *rock nacional* has served to simplify a rendition of the past, thus serving the current political regime which sees commemoration of the past horrors as a politically expedient move. The links between dictatorship and *rock nacional* have become increasingly important in the past ten years as human rights activists have sought to prevent the general population from forgetting about the abuses of the dictatorial era.

⁷ Ibid., 51-52.

⁸ Eduardo Berti, *Rockología: Documentos de los '80* (Buenos Aires: Beas Ediciones, 1994).

While academic scholarship has failed to take note of this transition, literature about the history of *rock nacional* has started to make the same connections. This has occurred in subtle ways as commemorative projects of the history of *rock nacional* have looked at its development chronologically, starting in 1965, the year before the military coup led by Carlos Onganía.⁹ It has also occurred in much more specific ways, of which Sergio Pujol's *Rock y Dictadura: Crónica de una generación* is the best example.¹⁰ Accompanying this chorus of books written about the links between dictatorship and *rock nacional* is a plethora of newspaper articles, museum exhibits, and human rights concerts. On the day of the thirtieth anniversary of the 24 March 1976 coup, a journalist for *La Nación* wrote, in referring to one of Charly García's most famous dictatorship-era albums, *Películas*:

rock began to grow ...and to affirm itself as an alternative cultural expression...As such, even though laborously, rock began to be a sort of refuge for young people who didn't have other spaces in which to express themselves. [It was] a distinct language for those who were looking for a distinct way to live.¹¹

In 2001, the *Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Histórico Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* organized a day to discuss the role of *rock nacional* in Argentine

⁹ Examples of this will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter, but books which exemplify this commemorative trend include the following: Pablo Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores: El rock nacional en la cultura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1993), 14, 21; Adriana J. Bergero and Fernando Reati, comps., "Rockeros y grafiteros: la construcción al sesgo de una antimemoria," in *Memoria colectiva y políticas de olvido: Argentina y Uruguay, 1970 - 1990* (Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1997), 7; Claudia Kozak, *Rock en Letras* (Buenos Aires: Libros del Quirquincho, 1990); Cecilia Mariana Benedditti, "el rock nacional desde una perspectiva folclórica: el caso de la Renga," *Revista de investigaciones folclóricas* 14 (December 1999); Mario Antonelli, *Gatos Salvajes 1965, Los 40 Años de Rock de Autor En Castellano 2005* (Buenos Aires: Catalogos, 2005).

¹⁰ Pablo Vila and Paul Cammack, "Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina," *Popular Music* 6, no. 2 (May 1987); Sergio Pujol, *Rock y dictadura: Crónica de una generación (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editoriales S.A., 2005).

¹¹ Daniel Amiano, "Qué se puede hacer salvo ver películas," *La Nación*, 24 March 2006.

culture.¹² With rock music playing an integral role in the construction of Argentine national identity—it is, after all, called *rock nacional*—and with it continuing to be the third most exported rock music in the world (after that of Britain and the United States),¹³ it is time that scholarship on memory of dictatorship take into account the important role that this music has played for Argentines in recounting and coming to terms with their country's violent past.

There are hundreds of *rock nacional* musicians whose music references the dictatorship, a handful whose careers continue today, and only two—García and Gieco—whose popularity has brought them into regular contact with Argentine politicians and human rights organizations. I argue that Argentine politicians have incorporated Gieco and García into a national discourse that commemorates select victims of the Dirty War. According to Holocaust scholar Tzvetan Todorov, there are good and bad uses of memory.¹⁴ Commemoration, Todorov maintains, is the worst use of all:

the discourse of commemoration is not objective at all. While history makes the past more complicated, commemoration makes it simpler, since it seeks most often to supply us with heroes to worship or with enemies to detest; it deals in desecration and consecration.¹⁵

The challenge of commemoration is very much a live topic in present day Argentina; by studying the way Gieco and García have fit into commemoration, I draw a clear portrait of the shortcomings of commemoration as it has been undertaken by the Argentine government.

¹² “El rock nacional bajo la lupa,” *La Nacion*, 16 April 2001.

¹³ Vila, “Argentina’s ‘Rock Nacional,’” 1.

¹⁴ See Alain Finkielkraut, Tzvetan Todorov, and Richard Marienstras, *Du bon usage de la mémoire* (Genève: éditions du Tricorne, 2000).

¹⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 133.

While the government seems to have made every attempt to frame Gieco and García into a neat discourse which mourns the victims of military rule and discounts the victims of leftist guerrillas, *rock nacional* is rich and varied enough that it provides multiple entry points to understanding both sides of this past. The ability to gather thousands, to make a temporary community of otherwise unconnected individuals, is one of the most powerful aspects of music. Argentine dictators and elected officials alike have recognized the incredible kinship which is evoked by shared musical taste and have, over the course of the past four decades, made every attempt to control, co-opt, or otherwise harness the affinity of a rocking crowd.

As national discourse about dictatorship has moved towards commemoration, rock music has breathed life into recollections of the past through what Jorge Monteleone has called “el cuerpo constelado.”¹⁶ Unlike many musical genres, listening to rock music is always active: at the very least fingers will tap, the listener will hum. Music fans will do their best to sing along, thus intensifying the feeling of community through participation. Annie Coombes, author of *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, argues that, “monuments are animated and reanimated only through performance”.¹⁷ While she is speaking about the various ways that Afrikaaner monuments have been defaced, recontextualized or otherwise altered in post-Apartheid South Africa, I think her point speaks also to the centrality of public performance and participation in commemoration. Never passive, rock music has called generations of Argentines into the fray of sweaty concert halls and underground pubs. In

¹⁶ Jorge Monteleone, “Cuerpo constelado: Sobre la poesía de rock argentina.” *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, nos. 517-519 (1993), 401-20.

¹⁷ Annie E. Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 12.

the past decade, rock music has come to occupy a different set of spaces. Musicians such as Charly García and León Gieco have broken formal social and political restrictions by playing protest music in spaces like the national opera house, *Teatro Colon*, the presidential home at *quinta de Olivos*, and the seat of government at the Casa Rosada.¹⁸ Spaces socially coded for high culture—ballet, opera, and symphonies—have recently opened their doors to the heroes of *rock nacional*. When specific performers are invited into spaces like these, a selection is being made that corroborates the way both *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and the current governmental leaders are choosing to recall the past.

The first chapter of the thesis looks at scholarship of the dictatorship, highlighting the various ways in which the historiography connects with the study of *rock nacional* and suggesting how the study of this music enriches our understanding of youth culture that was too often a military target. In addition, this chapter outlines the history of the dictatorship, focusing on the implications censorship had for culture at different points between 1976 and 1983, while also providing some background to previous dictatorial regimes.

The second chapter delves into the early years of rock in Argentina, tracing its rise from subculture to mass culture, the genesis of the term *rock nacional* and its associations with ideas of authenticity and reality. Chapter two also introduces two of *rock nacional*'s heroes: Charly García and León Gieco whose *personajes* have come to represent alternative faces of Argentina: urban versus rural, tango versus folk,

¹⁸ Quinta typically means a country house, and here refers to the fact that the presidential home does not belong to its occupant, the president. A *lunfardo* dictionary, however, defines *quinta* as any penal institution that has gardens, thus etymologically linking the Argentine presidential term with a prison sentence.

postmodernity versus modernity, the fragment versus the narrative. I argue that despite the outwardly oppositional stance these musicians took against the military, these *rockeros* still shared the hegemonic values of the nation upon which the military drew for sustenance and justification. These middle class, white, male rockers flourished despite (and because of) the military regime. These contradictions dismantle a simple narrative of music as resistance, providing a more nuanced understanding of rock culture under dictatorship.

The third, and final, chapter explores the way in which post-dictatorship scholars, journalists and social critics have used *rock nacional* as a stand-in for present-day hopes about democracy, human rights, and justice in a nation whose institutions have failed in these regards. By looking at the way in which García and Gieco have or have not embraced the rock music industry and its attendant discourse it will be shown that García, after 1983, resigned himself to the pressures of fans and the market and lost authority over his own work. Gieco, on the other hand, kept the recording industry at arm's length, thus maintaining much tighter control over the message he wanted to convey. For those concerned with recalling dictatorship, this has made Gieco a much more probable hero; his unblemished record of human rights activity makes him an ideal stand-in for the performing of commemoration. Both these musicians have formed close alliances with *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, and I argue that it is because Gieco and García have been brought into the human rights fold that they have been so decorated by politicians and national cultural bodies in the recent decade. A symbiotic relationship has developed between human rights activists, politicians and the cultural figures who recall the dictatorship period through the desired lens.

This thesis argues that *rock nacional* has become one of the most powerful monuments to Argentina's disappeared. Because listening to rock music is never passive, because *rock nacional* is replete with references to dictatorship, and because it has come to animate a significant number of commemorative projects in Argentina it is an area that warrants further study. Furthermore, the role of García and Gieco in animating this past puts into relief the selective memory that is being promoted by the current administrators of memory: the government and *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*.

Chapter One

Dictatorship Culture

When General Videla, Admiral Massera and Brigadier General Agosti overthrew Isabel Perón's government on March 24, 1976, few people anticipated the extent to which this junta would distinguish itself from previous generations of military men who had governed Argentina from 1930 onward. Though sometimes compared to the military's iron rule in the 1940s and 1950s (esteemed writer and activist, Ernesto Sábato, called Argentina's past an "interminable history of torture"), Argentines typically describe the dictatorship of 1976-83 in superlative terms.¹ For some, what was extraordinary about this period was its stability and security while, for others, the period can be described as the bloodiest or most dangerous era in recent Argentine history.

This chapter has two aims. First, it will provide a basic outline of the history of dictatorship in Argentina, highlighting the historical precedents of authoritarian rule before examining the specifics of the most recent dictatorship. I examine the publications and scholarship produced prior to 1983, which will illustrate the extent to which Argentines were censored by the military junta. Secondly, I trace the scholarship of the Dirty War post 1983 emphasizing works which have dealt with memory and commemoration of the dictatorship. I show that while there has been some scholarship on the connections between popular culture (cinema, theatre and literature have received particularly close study) and dictatorship, rock music has received scant attention. There is no scholarship which addresses *rock nacional's* increasing prominence in commemorative projects of the past decade.

¹ Ernesto Sábato, in Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 12.

Between 1930 and 1976 there were nine civilian-backed military coups,² a series of political turnovers due in part to a 1930 ruling by the Supreme Court of Argentina, which stated that

the armed forces could legally oust an elected government. To obtain legitimation for coups already performed, [it]... had to ...provide the courts with reasons for its intervention, an outline of its intentions, and a promise to obey the constitution and uphold existing legislation.³

The period between 1955 and 1973 saw military influence strengthen and the economy weaken.

As a response to the fortification of military influence and inspired by the Cuban Revolution of 1959, guerrilla activity flourished in 1960s Argentina, making it the base for the largest number of urban guerrillas in the hemisphere.⁴ Between 1969 and 1975, guerrillas killed 687 individuals. While this figure hardly matches the estimated 30,000 the military killed—supposedly in an effort to suppress subversion—guerrilla activity certainly had a destabilizing impact on Argentine society. The current arbiters of memory have overlooked the victims and legacy of pre-coup guerrilla terrorism. Their victims were most often military or police, but included high-ranking executives from multinational organizations and their families.⁵ While it might be too much to suggest that individuals employed by the state—and thus killed in the line of duty—or millionaires such as CEO's for Ford, Exxon or Kodak were victims on par with *los desaparecidos*, I think this is a direct result of the narrative which posits that the majority of the military's victims were innocent. If ex-*Montonero* Juan Gasparini's numbers are

² Feitlowitz, 5.

³ Marchak, 51.

⁴ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, an Argentine doctor, was one of the key figures in the revolution and provided an Argentine role-model for young like-minded individuals. Paul Lewis' book is *Guerillas and Generals: The "Dirty War" in Argentina*, (Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2001).

⁵ Ibid., 57.

correct, then the *Montonero*'s lost up to 5,000 combatants in the first year after the coup, suggesting that the similarly sized ERP would have had comparable losses and therefore that, at least in that first year, the primary targets were directly implicated in subversive activity.⁶ While this should not be read as a justification for a military response that was often grotesque and always unconstitutional, it still disrupts the notion that the military's victims were altogether innocent. According to law historian Mark Osiel,

It would be wrong to minimize the disruptive effects of left-wing terrorism on Argentine society in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as many scholars were long inclined to do. The most careful, recent study of the Montoneros now insists, by contrast, that there was very much a real 'war' between the guerillas and military and even that 'the guerrillas were not in retreat by the time of the 1976 coup.'⁷

Perón's government set up the state-funded Triple-A as a countermeasure for the revolutionary Montoneros.⁸ Under the direction of José López Rega—also known as “El Brujo”—this paramilitary force employed brutal measures to counteract the Montoneros, many of whom were university-aged students who tended towards Marxism, Catholicism and Peronism.⁹

Though officially democratic, the years between the return of Juan Perón and the coup of 1976 were a stormy brew of economic collapse and increasing violence:

In two and a half years, between the end of 1973 and the beginning of 1976, those paramilitary groups perpetrated no less than 900 assassinations... In front of the total passivity of the authorities and of the security forces, the Triple A periodically published lists of persons who, if they didn't leave the country, would be assassinated.¹⁰

⁶ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 47.

⁷ Mark J. Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Ordinary Evil, and Hannah Arendt: Criminal Consciousness in Argentina's Dirty War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 12 – 13.

⁸ Triple-A were was composed of police and army men, and were was never condemned by police, by the courts or by the government. Newspapers published the Triple A's daily list of individuals who had better leave Argentina within 24 hours or they would be murdered. (Marchak, *God's Assassins*, 113).

⁹ Marchak, *God's Assassins*, 238.

¹⁰ Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La Dictadura Militar (1976-1983): Del golpe de Estado a la restauración democrática* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós SAICF, 2003), 81.

Violence in these years was very public; despite the 1974 security law that outlawed publication of this sort, one study records that newspapers in these years recorded a total of 8502 armed incidents.¹¹ Juan Perón passed away in 1974; the presidency passed to his wife, Isabel, whose disastrous management of the country is often blamed for both the 1976 military coup, and the nation's whole-hearted acceptance of it. Civil unrest, economic instability, governmental inadequacy and a historic reliance on the *mano duro* of the military were all factors which led to the 24 March 1976 coup. The military junta mimicked earlier military juntas in its oppressive tactics, but also imitated the early Perón years which saw the government explicitly mold ideas of Argentina as a nation through insidious censorship laws that targeted music, dance, and language.

The dictatorship of 1976-83 can be broken down into three periods defined by changing leadership. From 1976 to 1981, the nation was led by the three-man military junta composed of Admiral Emilio E. Massera, Army General Jorge Rafael Videla (who became President), and Brigadier General Orlando R. Agosti. This period saw the implementation of a vast network of censorship and cultural control in the nation. The military's so-called war against subversion continued with 1976-9 seeing the peak of the disappearances. Hidden concentration camps dotted the country, and were autonomously governed by military commanders in charge of one of the five sub-zones into which Argentina had been divided. A majority was located in urban centres like Buenos Aires, Rosario, Córdoba and Mendoza.¹²

¹¹ Juan Carlos Marin's study, uncited, is found in Ines Izaguirre's "Recapturing the Memory of politics," 32; For information on the 1974 security law, please see Patricia Marchak, *Gods Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 125.

¹² The Acción Coordinada de Organizaciones de Derechos Humanos, Argentina has an incredible website which places these concentration camps on a topographical map of the country, explaining the duration of their operation, the area and zone into which they belonged and the commanders of each zone. The site can

It was under General Videla's rule that the most disappearances occurred and thus it was then that the first of the mothers of disappeared children began to march in front of the Casa Rosada on Thursday afternoons. It was Videla who almost ushered Argentina into war with another of the region's dictators—Augusto Pinochet—over the Beagle Channel (1977-78), and opened the 1978 FIFA World Cup, which Argentina won. He presided over the exile of many prominent Argentines: the writer Julio Cortazar, the singers Mercedes Sosa and León Gieco, and other artists would all leave the nation.

On 29 March 1981, Roberto Eduardo Viola Prevedini replaced Videla, whose term had expired; Viola served as interim president until December 11, 1981. Historians agree that from approximately 1981 onward, the military was looking for an exit strategy.¹³ Viola relaxed some of the censorship laws and attempted *rapprochements* with youth via his promotion of rock music, even inviting prominent rockers like Charly García and Luis Alberto Spinetta to speak 'freely' with him in his offices. Eduardo Berti says of this absurd situation:

The rockers couldn't believe it. "I tossed them a few things and suggested that they construct the largest space observatory in the world, it was delirium, but what was I going to say to them," says Spinetta today. Meanwhile, García and Lebón wrote later in "Encounter with the devil," that "I never thought I would find myself with the boss/ in his office in such a good mood/ asking me to say what I thought of this situation."¹⁴

Viola was soon ousted by a military coup that saw him replaced by the Army's commander-in-chief, Lieutenant General Leopoldo Galtieri who served as *de facto* president until 18 June 1982. Galtieri was made famous for his misguided, and under-

be accessed through "Memoria Abierta," found at:
http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/eng/camino_al_museo.html#.

¹³ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 8.

¹⁴ Berti, *Rockologia*, 81.

equipped, attempt at war against Britain over *Las Malvinas* (The Falkland Islands). Like Viola, he tried to co-opt youth culture, this time by bringing it into a Latin American solidarity (minus Chile) against the British. Much to his chagrin, *La Festival de Solidaridad Latinamericana* turned out to be resoundingly anti-war. The last military leader, Reynaldo Benito Antonio Bignone Ramayón, led the country until Raúl Alfonsín was elected president on December 10, 1983. Bignone had no choice but to admit that military rule was almost over, but he attempted to use his time in power to legislate against the military being punished for its crimes against humanity.¹⁵ These changes in leadership are important because they provide a first indication of the heterogeneity of the dictatorship years, which saw fluctuations in censorship, violence, and economic conditions.

Presidents Videla, Viola, Galtieri, and Bignone each headed the state in different ways and had to respond to different conditions. Videla presided over the country when it was at its most secure. On the one hand this meant that dictatorial controls were at their peak under his reign, and on the other, it meant that Argentines were at their most cooperative in these years. Apart from public relations feats like the World Cup of 1978, Videla also enjoyed the popularity garnered by the summer of 1979, when the middle classes took advantage of *la plata dulce* [sweet money], traveling abroad in large numbers.¹⁶

Viola, Galtieri, and Bignone faced a different situation. The government censors eased off, the formerly united army, navy and air forces began to factionalize, and anti-

¹⁵ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 8.

¹⁶ "Mientras el mundo exportaba de todo—televisores a color y cantantes, por ejemplo—la Argentina exportó turistas [While the world exported everything—color TVs and singers, for example—Argentina exported tourists]," Pujol, *Rock y dictadura*, 117.

military protests gained a critical mass. The break between Videla and Viola, Galtieri and Bignone occurred in 1981; this year is a watershed year in terms of both international and internal publications that dealt with the dictatorship. The following section of this chapter will examine the evolution of both local and international publications (including a range of scholarship, testimonials, artistic publications, and inquiries) as a means of demonstrating the strict censorial control that characterized the early dictatorship and the later collapse of such controls. On the one hand, rock music production echoed these fluctuations, but on the other, it found creative ways to evade censorial control, thus providing an unbiased account of this period by performers who represented the most heavily targeted group: urban youth.

The day of the coup went off without violent incident; journalists recalled the cloudy morning as being unusually calm and coverage of the coup was overwhelmingly laudatory. General Videla, Admiral Massera and Brigadier General Orlando R. Agosti—of the army, navy and air force respectively—would provide the needed *mano duro*, leading Argentina to its rightful future as a civilized Western nation. The esteemed Jorge Luis Borges—a writer known for his right-wing, international connections—called the three-man junta the “Gentlemen of the Coup,” and applauded them for ending Peronist rule.¹⁷ Years later, Borges would come to regret this deferential nomination, saying in 1980:

They say that the number of victims has been exaggerated, but one case is enough; Cain slew Abel only once; Christ only once was crucified.¹⁸

¹⁷ Feitlowitz, 7.

¹⁸ Quoted in the footnotes to Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 259 from an interview Borges had given to the Italian weekly *Panorama* (September 15, 1980).

In addition to the initial support of writers like Jorge Luis Borges, the Catholic Church hierarchy—which was aligned with the right in Argentina—supported the coup and in turn enjoyed the military's support.¹⁹ On the day after the coup, a populist newspaper entitled *La Prensa* congratulated the military and said the change in government heralded a promising future for the country:

With the fall of the government we have started to close one of the most unfortunate and convulsive periods in the evolution of the country. A disgraceful accumulation of faults and errors by governments of little vision and, with few exceptions, of political leaders that subordinated everything in the name of electoral success, favoured the return of the great responsible one and its new advent of power, restoring a system of governance that, by its nature, couldn't but end in a national disaster.²⁰

Jacobo Timerman, editor of *La Opinión* and someone who would eventually be kidnapped and tortured himself, praised the military, saying it “would bring Argentina the civilized reparation that it deserved.”²¹ Local observers from left and right fell into step behind the “gentlemen,” and international observers—for the most part—did the same.

The rapidly collapsing economy had been one of the major catastrophes of the previous government. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) responded immediately to the change in government by granting loans to Argentina, funds that had previously been withheld.²² The economic benefits brought to Argentina because of the dictatorship were

¹⁹ At this time, there were two arms of the Catholic Church: the first was the official hierarchy which was profoundly anti-Marxist, anti- Peronist and supported the spiritual value of the crusade against subversion in Argentina. The second arm, much more minor arm, was allied with the left-wing guerillas, and was committed to armed struggle if it would improve the plight of the poor. This arm was called the Third World Priests. Information garnered from Jaime Malamud-Goti, *Game Without End: State Terror and the Politics of Justice*, (Norman: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 23.

²⁰ “Sin ira y sin odio,” *La Prensa*, 25 March 1976, “Editorial,” p. 6.

²¹ Quoted in Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, from the front pages of Jacobo Timerman's *La Opinión* on March 26 and 27, 1976.

²² “Ortogó un credito a la Argentina el FMI,” *La Prensa*, 26 March 1976, p.1.

significant, and an important part of its initial success. An article in the *New York Times* published just months after the coup reported that, “the civilian economic team headed by José Martínez de Hoz has won a measure of international confidence by reducing inflation, restoring a free market economy, and facilitating foreign investment.”²³ However, the article noted that a pending recession might swell the left-wing guerilla ranks and said: “It is a race against time: Can the military wipe out the guerillas before disgruntled workers swell their ranks?”²⁴

In an effort to prevent the spread of subversion, the military junta aimed not only to wipe out guerrillas but to clamp down on unfavorable culture. As Borges had noted, the three-man junta was of a gentlemen’s class. They were well-educated men with a nuanced understanding of the importance of image and of controlling culture. As was the case throughout the regime, language and euphemism were central tools in governing the nation.²⁵ Careful management of language and tone can be seen in the first official speech given by the Junta:

[This takeover is] an obligation which surges from serene meditations about the irreparable consequences that the entire Nation could have, a distinct attitude to that previously adopted. This decision follows the proposal to put to an end all the lack of governance, the corruption, the subversive extortion and it is only directed against those who have been delinquent or have committed abuses of power.²⁶

By employing images of serene meditations and careful decision-making, the military sidestepped any notion of irrational power-hungry control of the country. Most narratives of the 24 March 1976 coup depict it as a rather quiet day in Buenos Aires, and

²³ Andrew Tarnowski, “Economy is Better, Political Mayhem Worse,” *The New York Times*, 25 July 1976, p. 113.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁵ The regime’s use of language is the central issue addressed in Feitlowitz’s *A Lexicon of Terror*.

²⁶ “Proclama de los comandantes,” *La Prensa*, 25 March 1976, p.7.

this is significant because, unlike the example of General Augusto Pinochet's overthrow of President Salvador Allende in Chile three years earlier, this was a calmly taken decision, one which could be couched in moral imperatives and images of reconstitution, resurrection and the saving of the nation.

Though the dictatorships prior to that of 1976-1983 also made efforts to manage cultural production that might have been subversive, none were as effective as that of General Videla. The press in Argentina that had long-prided itself on its objectivity and freedom, came up against a wall. The military junta set out, in their Process of National Reorganization (*El Proceso*), to militarize not only the government, but every aspect of national life. In the early stages of *El Proceso*, the Assistant Secretary of Culture of the Province of Buenos Aires, Francisco Carcavallo, said:

In our country, the channels of artistic and cultural infiltration have been used through a deforming process based on protest songs, the exaltation of extremist artists and texts, vanguard theatres and openings that, by transference they use subtly, musicalization of poems [and] plastic arts with a markedly guerrilla tint.²⁷

To prevent such artistic infiltration, military officers took up governing positions in medical schools, newspapers, universities, radio stations, prestigious art houses and even the crown of Buenos Aires cultural life: the opera house, Teatro Colón.²⁸ All of these institutions, part of the bedrock of cultural and intellectual life in Argentina, suffered from terrible mismanagement during the dictatorship; not only was the circulation of ideas strictly controlled, but crucial funds for the arts were squandered by military men with no interest in their ongoing sustainability. Wherever possible, whether by limiting

²⁷ Avellaneda, Andrés. *Censura, autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina, 1960 – 1983*, (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1986), 138.

²⁸ John Simpson and Jana Bennett, *The Disappeared and the Mothers of the Plaza: The Story of the 11,000 Argentinians Who Vanished* (: St Martins Pr, 1985), 212-217.

Argentina's international financial dependency, burning books by Freud, Marx, and Darwin, or banning Béjart's ballets and songs by the Beatles and Joan Baez, the military tried to seal Argentina off from corrupting international influences.²⁹ What was promoted, according to BBC foreign service journalist, John Simpson, was pop music—including John Travolta-inspired disco—and the so called 'Process Art' whose supposedly harmless geometrical and op-art designs pleased the military for their lack of reference to daily life.³⁰

For newspapers and other media whose *raison d'être* was daily life, the military provided point-by-point instructions on how the quotidian should be reported. Short of being closed down by the military or having their circulations severely limited by a shortage of government-controlled newspaper supplies, newspapers were expected to abide by the list of "Principles and Procedures to be Followed by Mass Communication Media."³¹ Released in *The Buenos Aires Herald*, the list reveals three central points of *El Proceso*: the upholding of Christian values, the fear of youth subversion, and the manipulation of language.³² There are several key points which merit quotation. Media outlets were instructed to:

1. Foster the restitution of fundamental values which contribute to the integrity of society: order, work, national identity, and honesty within the context of Christian morals.
 2. Preserve the defense of the family institution....
 4. Promote for youth social models which stress the values mentioned in (1) to replace and eradicate present values....
- [And]

²⁹ Ibid, 218-219.

³⁰ Ibid, 229.

³¹ Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, trans. ;Tony Talbot (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 22-23.

³² Eric Thomas Bradley, "From Lapdog to Watchdog: Editorials in Buenos Aires's *La Prensa* during Dictatorship and Democracy, 1977 - 1984" (MA Journalism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1988), 19-20.

10. Eliminate all obscene words and images which are vulgar, shocking, or have double meanings.
12. Tend towards the grammatically correct use of the national language.³³

Christian morals and patriarchal family values were highlighted as of extreme importance to national identity. The reconstitution of youth identity which would be based on proper social values indicates the prevailing suspicion the military had of youth and their culture. This affected media culture in many ways, including the disappearance of youthful faces in advertising. Marketers feared the image of youth (and their associated misdemeanors) would deter customers.³⁴ Proper language and unblemished images were central issues for the military in constructing its own image and restricting the dissemination of contestational images throughout the nation. Masters of innuendo and euphemism, the military were doubly suspicious of its use elsewhere; rock musicians were pivotal purveyors of oppositional word play and thus subject to similar censorship.

Interestingly, the cultural imperatives put in place by the 1970s military strongly echoed changes wrought under the military dictatorships of the early 1940s which were continued under the leadership of Juan Perón. Turning away from the liberal ideas of nineteenth century Argentine thinkers like Sarmiento—the principle architect of Argentina’s education system and author of the liberal novel *Facundo*—1940s and 1950s heads of state rejected the role of foreign ideas and aimed to promote a strictly Argentine culture based on the Catholic church and a pure Spanish language.³⁵ This is the period when Catholic education was introduced into Argentine education, with moral instruction being its replacement for non-Catholic students. Like the contorted versions of 1970s

³³ Idem.

³⁴ Vila, “Argentina’s ‘Rock Nacional’,” 17.

³⁵ See Donald Castro’s *The Argentine Tango as Social History 1880-1955: The Soul of the People*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 206-211.

rock songs that appeared on albums, 1940s tango musicians saw their lyrics censored and translated so that immorality and *lunfardo* [*porteño* slang] would not be heard on national radio stations. In this way, Videla's military junta was hardly inventing a new Argentina, it was repeating reforms that had first been legislated in the Perón years.

Locally, the first year of the dictatorship seems to have provided some space for restrained criticism in the press. The *Buenos Aires Herald*, an English-language newspaper with limited circulation, had the most freedom because the military considered the threat it posed to be very minimal. For many, the *Herald* provided the only public record of peoples' disappearances:

Today is the second anniversary of the disappearance of Margarita Erlich, a young student of the fine arts. Her parents say that a group of armed men took her from the family apartment in this city around 1.30 a.m. on April 6th 1976, and they have been unable to learn anything of her fate or whereabouts since then.³⁶

Writing about the period in his 1981 memoir, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell without a Number*, Jacobo Timerman explained:

If *La Opinión* succeeded in surviving between March 1976 and April 1977...it was because army moderates decided that this journal, critical but not antagonistic, opposed to terrorism but supportive of human rights, ought to survive. The continued existence of *La Opinión* was a credit abroad; it backed the philosophy of future national reconstruction, it upheld the thesis of national unity, and was committed on a daily basis to curbing extremist excesses.³⁷

1977 saw a shift in this policy, wherein individuals in the media were often directly targeted (Timerman was kidnapped in April 1977, and Robert Cox, editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, was forced to leave the country). Those outlets which continued to publish were required to abide by the above principles and procedures. In essence, a veil of

³⁶ *The Herald*, 1978, Quoted in Simpson, *The Disappeared and the Mothers of the Plaza*, 244.

³⁷ Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name*, 27-28.

silence fell on journalistic publication during the Dirty War, preventing most Argentines from access to knowledge about the mounting number of disappearances in the nation.³⁸ In 1980 when an editor for the national daily, *La Nación*, was asked why his paper had failed to print stories about the disappearances he replied: “Our readers are not interested.”³⁹ As early as 1979, Argentine scholar José Antonio Allende conducted a study of the impact of censorship on local print media; the study was not published until 1981, likely because it was, itself, subject to reigning censorship.⁴⁰ Some scholars argue that there was no public will to report about the fates of the disappeared, because of an oft-stated belief that those whom the military was targeting were terrorists and therefore responsible for the gross instability of the country prior to 1976.⁴¹ For media scholars, this notion of “debería estar metido en algo” [s/he must have been involved in something] offers one explanation of a previously unseen self-censorship of print media in Argentina, indicating a wide level of support for the military junta especially in its first few years.

While instructions and edicts were one way in which the military attempted to control the mediated image of the nation, they also employed more sinister means. By

³⁸ Jerry W. Knudson, “Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983,” in *Latin American Perspectives*, 1997), 93-112.

³⁹ Ibid., 95. From the (*Index on Censorship*, March 1980, 46)

⁴⁰ José Antonio Allende. *Informe sobre el Proceso para la reorganización nacional*. Buenos Aires: Agencia Periodística CID, (prepared 1979), 1981.

⁴¹ Robert Cox, editor of one of the more outspoken dailies, the English language *Buenos Aires Herald*, said, “to be an editor in Argentina is to receive letters from otherwise sensible people who say to you, ‘you can’t have law anymore. The best thing is to deal with subversion any way possible. It has to be done secretly. It has to be done using their methods. You have to use terrorist methods against them’,” From: “Argentina Turns a Corner,” (Interview with Robert Cox), *Atlas World Press Review* 26 January 1979, p. 19. Quoted in Eric Thomas Bradley’s “From Lapdog to Watchdog: Editorials in Buenos Aires’s La Prensa during Dictatorship and Democracy, 1977 - 1984” (MA Journalism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1988), 24. Other scholars who support this view include Jerry W. Knudson, “Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983,” *Latin American Perspectives* 24.6 (November 1997): 93-112 and Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*. However, Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo argue that the construction of the innocent victim began in the early 1980s by figures such as Ernesto Sábato and systematically denied the role many victims had played in terrorist organizations; see Novaro and Palermo, *La Dictadura Militar (1976-1983)*, 487-488.

1980 it was becoming clear, first on the international scene and later locally, that many Argentines had been disappeared at the hands of the military. One historian putting this into perspective said:

The segment of Argentina's total population killed by the state in the Dirty War represents roughly the same proportion of U.S. citizens who were killed in the Vietnam War. Its enduring repercussions have proven no less profound.⁴²

Historian Patricia Marchak, in her book *God's Assassins* says that, "individuals who were between the ages of sixteen and thirty in 1975 [represented an]... estimated 81 per cent of the victims."⁴³ Youth, many of whom were becoming fervent rock music fans, represented an overwhelming number of those disappeared. Rock music recorded and amplified the reality of disappearance and censorship.

In addition to the disappearance of as many as 30,000 individuals, the military distinguished itself from other dictatorial regimes by its practice of kidnapping the newborn babies of their captives. Based on the rationale that these babies would otherwise be raised in a subversive environment and would pose a future threat to the state, pregnant subversives were kept alive and relatively healthy until they gave birth at which point the baby would be adopted into a high-ranking military home where it would receive 'proper' training. This aspect of Videla's regime is narrated in the Oscar-winning film, *La Historia Oficial*.⁴⁴

That there were very few venues willing to directly address the reality of disappearance meant that youth remained faceless victims of the Dirty War; only prominent intellectuals garnered marginally more attention in the press. For example,

⁴² Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Ordinary Evil, and Hannah Arendt*, 13.

⁴³ Marchak, *God's Assassins*, 12.

⁴⁴ Puenzo, Luis and Aida Bortnik. *La historia oficial*. New York : Fox Lorber Home Video: 1985.

Rodolfo Walsh—a well-known playwright, social commentator, and former urban guerrilla—was disappeared in 1977 following the publication of a critical letter on the first anniversary of the military coup.⁴⁵ While Videla was cataloging the virtues and accomplishments of his year in power, Walsh had written *una carta abierta* [an open letter] addressed to the government which said just the opposite:

That which you call good choices are errors, that which you recognize as errors are crimes and that which you omit are calamities. Fifteen thousand *desaparecidos*, ten thousand imprisoned, four thousand dead, tens of thousands exiled are the naked numbers of this terror. The ordinary prisons are full, and out of the principle garrisons of the country you have created virtual concentration camps where no judge, lawyer, journalist or international observer may enter.⁴⁶

Walsh went on to outline other crimes—including the lack of infrastructure provided to the poor of the growing Villas Miserias which surround Buenos Aires. He was kidnapped the following day, and later found washed up on the shore of the River Plate. His death was recorded only in the *Buenos Aires Herald* and the offshore *Radio Colonia*.⁴⁷ His was not the only cadaver to appear in these early days:

In 1976, and again at the end of 1978, there appeared numerous cadavers floating in the coastal waters of the River Plate...On one occasion, the media started to fantasize that the bodies of various youth had appeared floating in Uruguay as a result of an orgy party in the open sea that had ended in shipwreck. This explanation seemed to satisfy the majority and no one spoke more about the matter.⁴⁸

Rodolfo Walsh would later become one of the martyrs of the dictatorship and a veritable idol for some rock musicians, but many others would remain nameless.

⁴⁵ Walsh was a member of the *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP) that was dismantled in 1968 and a leader of the Descamisados which merged with the Montoneros in 1973. For more information please see: Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*), 38-9, 42.

⁴⁶ <http://www.literatura.org/Walsh/Walsh.html>

⁴⁷ Michael John Garaghty, <http://www.irishargentine.org/rodolfowalsh.htm>

⁴⁸ Novaro and Palermo, *La Dictadura Militar (1976-1983)*, 485.

Disappearance became the *modus operandus* of the military's war against subversion in Argentina, and was at its peak in the first few years of dictatorship. By the end of the Dirty War, human rights organizations would claim that 30,000 had disappeared. Recognizing, as societies often do, that youth were the future of the nation, the military aimed their cleansing operation there. In 1977, General Adel Vilas of the Fifth Army Corps said:

Up to now, only the tip of the iceberg has been affected by our war against subversion...It is necessary to destroy the sources which feed, form and indoctrinate the subversive delinquent, and this source is the universities and the secondary schools themselves.⁴⁹

While it certainly cannot have been every university and high school that promoted *Montonero* or ERP ideology, Paul Lewis notes that guerrilla organizations saw these institutions as fertile ground for spreading their ideology and for providing front organizations for their illegal activities.⁵⁰

With the military harnessing strict control over mass media in Argentina, Argentines who were not in favour of the military turned to other media in order to be heard; underground newspapers, international journalists and scholars, and international human rights groups such as Amnesty International all became important allies. By 1979, rifts within the junta and increasing international pressure meant a relaxation of censorship and thus more forthright expression coming from within Argentina and an even more vociferous opposition from without.⁵¹ Testimonies from survivors started to

⁴⁹ Simpson and Bennett, *The Disappeared and the Mothers of the Plaza*, 209.

⁵⁰ Lewis also notes that such front organizations (which often included unions) also provided militia for larger scale operations, Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 35-57.

⁵¹ See Juan de Onis, "Argentine Junta Gives Program for Restoring Elected Governments," *New York Times*, 20 December 1979, p. A7. The article outlines a very preliminary document which proposed conditions under which the army would accept a return of political parties to the Argentine system.

appear in 1981, coinciding with a relaxation of censorship in the press and the proliferation of grassroots human rights movements – many of which had had their roots in earlier, more repressive years. With the debacle of the military campaign in *Las Malvinas*, a new form of anti-military discourse emerged, which focused on the absolute incompetence of the military in, even, military affairs.

By monopolizing the mass media in Argentina, the military junta effectively controlled the distribution of ideas throughout the nation. Harold Innes has argued that, “the faster that a cultural product can be delivered from one area to another, [the faster] space between the areas gets annihilated.”⁵² While there was a vast number of underground media—many of which were *media casera* or home made, *Expreso Imaginario* being the most popular example—the circulation of contestational ideas were always extremely limited in space and number. This meant that despite the number of underground circuits of information, the military always monopolized the media which spread the fastest (dailies, TV, radio) and thus annihilated the space which might have permitted more dissent to develop.

The impact of this censorship was recently illustrated this year at a commemoration of the 24 March 1976 military coup held in Montreal. At this event a documentary by Román Lejtman entitled *El Proceso*, was shown.⁵³ The film outlined the basic history of the military dictatorship, showing footage of the first time General Videla admitted (in Colombia in 1978) that Argentines had disappeared, his first meeting with Jimmy Carter (at the White House in 1977), and the cheering crowds before the Casa

⁵² As paraphrased by Ien Ang in *Living Room Wars; Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1995), 151.

⁵³ Román Lejtman, *El Proceso*, Pagina 12, 2003.

Rosada with Galtieri waving at them from a balcony above (just after the announcement of the Malvinas War, 1982). *El Proceso* captured the major political turning points of the dirty war, but Lejtman also peppered the film with the promotional information pieces the military had made for Argentine television. Children's cartoons featured a cow afraid of subversives and 30-second clips showing men in suits breathing easily in the calmed economic air. After the film screening in Montréal, a man who had been imprisoned in one of Argentina's concentration camps between 1976 and 1981 stood up to speak. He told the story of how, just after being released, he ran into an old friend from school in the streets. Thrilled to see him he tried to *darle un abrazo y un beso* (kisses and hugs as a sign of affection), and his friend rejected him, saying "*No me comprometes, no me toques,*" (Don't compromise my safety, don't touch me). After watching *El Proceso* the man suddenly understood how it was that his friend could reject him: he could see how the media had been so effective in creating an atmosphere of fear throughout the country.

While the military effectively dominated Argentina's mass media, there were many ways in which popular culture was able to evade censorship and express dissent. Musicians often relied on creative solutions to censorship through the use of metaphorical lyrics or even lyrics that only concert-goers would hear (record-labels always fell into step with national censors for fear that the military might prevent a company from taking a record to market). Live performances were one way to evade censorship. Theatre scholar Jean Graham-Jones, in *Exorcising History*, makes the interesting point that the early years of *El Proceso* saw an increase in the production of plays, despite a decrease in the number of theatre-goers; local reviewers described 1976 and 1977 as brilliant years

for theatre.⁵⁴ Theater, because of its limited diffusion (as opposed to television and film), was subjected to less censorial control. Often plays and performers were left alone if the productions took place in non-mainstream theatres or cabaret spaces. Like theatre, rock music had a brief calm before the storm; 1976-77 saw rock music's popularity grow, temporarily unabated. The junta, taking its cue from Chile's dictator, General Pinochet, preferred to ignore the productions rather than draw additional public attention and possible criticism by creating a cause célèbre out of a publicized closure and prohibition. Nevertheless, theaters were subjected to sporadic censorship, often without any apparent logic behind the attacks.⁵⁵

While music and theatrical productions proved tricky to control, other forms of cultural production were subjected to far stricter censorship. Film and fiction, in particular, saw a drastic drop in production and publication in the early years of dictatorship. For example,

During the dictatorship, book burnings were organized, and certain artistic products, including plays, were prohibited by official decree....Producers of the offending materials, such as publishing houses and theaters, were closed down temporarily. Bookstore owners, publishers and distributors often destroyed their own holdings to avoid censure.⁵⁶

Censorship was at its height in the first three years of dictatorship. By 1980, with a plethora of international journalists, scholars, and human rights organizations denouncing the lack of human rights in Argentina, a marked increase in free expression within Argentina was seen. Literature, for example, that would have been published through international presses earlier in the dictatorship began to be printed by local presses in the

⁵⁴Jean Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theatre Under Dictatorship* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 26.

⁵⁵Ibid, 18.

⁵⁶Ibid, 16-17.

1980s. What scholarship was produced locally under these conditions, therefore, generally dealt with themes that would have been acceptable to the military regime. The history of subversion in Argentina was a popular topic.⁵⁷

The publishing industry provides an effective way to measure the degree to which censorship was effective. Between 1976 and 1980, the vast majority of literature critical of the regime was published outside of the country.⁵⁸ Mark Osiel, notes that “the number of books published in Argentina dropped by more than two-thirds between 1976 to 1979.”⁵⁹ Works that criticized authoritarian rule were often either re-prints or were published in the early days of dictatorship.⁶⁰ In 1980, the tides turned. Of literature

⁵⁷ Revista Somos, *Historia y personajes de una época trágica*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Atlantida, 1977; Armando Alonso Pineiro, *Crónica de la subversión en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Depalma, 1980; Alejandro Lanusse. *Mi testimonio*. Buenos Aires: Lasserre Editores, 1977; Pablo Kandel and Mario Monteverde *Entorno y caída*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta Argentina, 1976; Roberto García. *Patria sincical versus patria socialista*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Depalma, 1980; Richard Gillespie. *Soldiers of Perón: Argentina's Montoneros*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982; Argentine Republic National. *Evolution of Terrorist Delinquency in Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Poder Ejecutivo: 1980; Andre Beafre. *La Guerra Revolucionaria*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Almena, 1979; José Teofilo Goyret. *Geopolítica y subversion*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Depalma, 1980.

⁵⁸ Literature published abroad during this early phase include: Humberto Constantini's *De dioses, homrecitos, y policies*, Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1979; Juan Carlos Martini's *El cerco*, Barcelona: Bruguera, 1977; Griselda Gambaro's *Dios no nos quiere contentos*, Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1979, and *Ganarse la muerte*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1976. Julio Cortázar's *Queremos tanto a Glenda y otros relatos*, Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1980; Mempo Giardinelli's *La revolución en bicicleta*, Barcelona: Editorial Pomaire, 1980; Manuel, Puig, *El beso de la mujer araña*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976, *Maldición eterna a quien lea estas páginas* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1980; *Publis angelical* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1979), Daniel Moyano, *La última conquista de El Angel* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1977), Vlady Kociancich, *La octava maravilla*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982; Juan José Saer, *Nadie nada nunca* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1980), Osvaldo Soriano, *Cuarteles de invierno* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1982); Marta Traba, *Conversación al sur*, Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1981; Luisa Valenzuela *Cambio de armas*, Hanover, N.H.: Ediciones del Norte, 1982.

⁵⁹ Mark J. Osiel, “Constructing Subversion in Argentina's Dirty War,” *Representations*.75 (Summer, 2001), 138.

⁶⁰ A fascinating example of the censorship of literature is discussed by Paula Di Dio, “The Legacy of Page Zero,” in *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule*, edited by Ksenija Bilbija, Jo Ellen Fair, Cynthia E. Milton, and Leigh A. Payne (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 15. According to Di Dio, Luisa Valenzuela's *Como en la Guerra*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1977) was published without ‘Page zero,’ [which] the author herself removed...[because] it recounted the testimony of a man being tortured and raped with the barrel of a gun....” Literature that was not censored included: Marta Lynch's *La penúltima versión*, a reprint in its fourth edition; *La penúltima versión de la Colorada Villanueva*, 4th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1979); Carlos Gorostiza, *Los cuartos oscuros* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1976), Griselda Gambaro's *Ganarse la muerte*, Buenos Aires:

published in Argentine publishing houses, the vast majority appeared in 1980 or later.⁶¹ Most Argentine authors writing in this period, therefore, had the experience of either not publishing books at the height of the repression, or becoming familiar with international publishing houses. Other media, such as rock music, saw a similar change. Sergio Pujol, who has written on tango, jazz and rock music in Argentina, notes that when the rock band, Almendra, reunited in 1979, they were immediately put on a black list making club owners wary offering them a contract. By 1980, however:

The threats didn't have an effect, even though they went against the logic of the music business. The president of Newell's Old Boys, for example, wasn't disposed to suspend a show that could give good dividends to the club, except in the existence of a concrete order to cancel.⁶²

This quotation illustrates the links between effective military control and a smoothly running economy; with fewer people benefiting financially from economic restructuring,

Ediciones de la Flor, 1976. Enrique Medina, *El Duke: Memorias y anti-memorias de un participante en la represión* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Eskol, 1976).

⁶¹ Mempo Giardinelli's *Qué solos se quedan los muertos*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Latinoamericana, 1985; Mempo Giardinelli's *Luna caliente*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984; Federico Moreyra, *Solamente ella*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Bruguera, 1981, --- *El desangradero*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Legasa, 1984; Daniel Moyano *El vuelo del tigre*, Buenos Aires: Legasa Literaria, 1981; Ricardo Piglia, *Respiración artificial*, Buenos Aires: Pomaire, 1980; Rodolfo Rabanal, *El otra parte*, Madrid: Legasa Litearia, 1981 (this is interesting because he'd published 2 other books, one before (1975 *El apartado*, and one after *El pasajero*, 1984, both in Buenos Aires), Jorge Masciángoli, *Buenaventura, nunca más*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1983, Eduardo A. Pavlovsky, *El Sr. Laforgue*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Búsqueda, 1983; Humberto Costantini, *La larga noche de Francisco Sanctis*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984; Antonio dal Masetto, *Fuego a discreción*, Buenos Aires: Folios Ediciones, 1983; Norberto Firpo, *Cuerpo a tierra*, Buenos Aires; Editorial Galerna, 1984 ---, *Grandísimo idiota*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1984, Hugo Foguet, *Préterito perfecto*, Buenos Aires: Legasa Literaria, 1983, Vicente Battista, *El libro de todos los engaños*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984; Jorge Asís, *La calle de los caballos muertos*, Buenos Aires: Legasa Literaria, 1984, ---, *Flores robadas en los jardines de Quilmes*, Buenos Aires: Losada, 1982; Mariano Castex, *El otro*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Rocío, 1983; Carlos Catania, *El pintaditos*, Buenos Aires: Legasa Literaria, 1984; Griselda Gambaro, *Teatro I: Real envido; La malasangre; Del sol naciente*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1984; Gerardo Mario Goloboff, *Criador de palomas*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984; Ana María Shua, *Soy paciente*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1980; Américo Alfredo Torchelli, *Bosta de paloma: Novela*, Buenos Aires: El Cid Editor, 1983; Javier Torre, *Quemar las naves*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1983; Luisa Valenzuela *Cola de lagartija*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1983; Francisco Zamora, *Bisiesto viene de golpe*, Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1983.

⁶² Pujol, *Rock y dictadura*, 148.

adhesion to censorship laws faltered. It was in this context that underground newspapers such as *Expreso Imaginario* noted that:

But in all this time the space for the free circulation of ideas has grown, basically through the forced circuit of homemade publications and independent productions. It has opened an exploration in search of a youth culture based in the realities of our country and continent.⁶³

While the military would stay in power for a full three years longer, there is no doubt that a cultural shift had occurred. As will be shown, rock music in Argentina would flourish under these conditions, profiting from the ongoing monster against which it could rebel while also profiting from a more liberal ambiance.

This liberalization was obvious once Videla stepped down: historians now recognize that from 1981 onwards, the military was looking for a way out, and popular culture certainly benefited from a less cohesive rule. From 29 March 1981, the end of Videla's rule, to 10 December 1983, the day President Raúl Alfonsón was elected, there were five *de facto* presidents of Argentina, some holding the reigns for as little as 11 days.⁶⁴ It was in this context that a rush of critical commentary on the dictatorship began to be published within Argentina.

Theatre, cinema, and rock music all thrived in the post-1980 cultural aperture. Films were made, some of which parodied the Dirty War (*No me habrá penas ni olvido* [Funny Little Dirty War]) and others which would start to address the legacy of disappearance (Academy Award winning *La Historia Oficial*).⁶⁵ Notable examples of

⁶³ Pipo Lernoud, 'Editorial,' *Expreso Imaginario*, July 1980, No. 48, no page numbers.

⁶⁴ Carlos Alberto Lacoste was *de facto* President from December 11- 22, 1981 and Alfredo Oscar Saint Jean was *de facto* President from June 18-July 1, 1982.

⁶⁵ Olivera, Hector, Fernando Ayala, et al. *No habrá más penas ni olvido*. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Condor Media, 1983; Puenzo, Luis and Aída Bortnik. *La historia oficial*. New York : Fox Lorber Home Video: 1985.

these types of sources can be found in virtually all genres. A new genre of theatre developed called *Teatro Abierto* which openly called for the end of dictatorship,⁶⁶ rock concerts saw whole concert stadiums shouting “*se va a acabar, la dictadura militar* [it’s going to end, the military dictatorship],”⁶⁷ and individual testimonies like Jacobo Timerman’s.

There is one interesting exception to the pattern of censorship. In 1979 the Organization of American States (OAS) released a report detailing human rights abuses and the disappearance of individuals. A *New York Times* journalist living in Buenos Aires noted that while the OAS report went unmentioned in the local news media, the, “same newspapers gave front-page display this week to an appeal by Pope John Paul II to Argentina and Chile for the disclosure of the fate of thousands of missing political prisoners.”⁶⁸ With the World Cup honeymoon well over and international pressure to declare the whereabouts of what was then thought to be about 5,000 missing political prisoners, the military junta was under pressure to change tactics.

Apart from anomalies of forthright news reporting as noted above, one of the only locally produced non-fictional investigations into the fates of political prisoners was undertaken by the Catholic Church. Published in 1977, *Documentos del Episcopado Argentino sobre la violencia* [Documents of the Argentine Church about the Violence]

⁶⁶ Jones, *Exorcising History*, 9.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Jelin, *Los movimientos sociales ante la crisis* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Universidad de las Naciones Unidas, 1986), 34 – 35. Interestingly enough, this was also reportedly chanted at the *Estadio de Gimnasia y Esgrima de La Plata* at a ceremony granting medals of honor to the army in September 1982, thus illustrating that even members of the military rejected dictatorial rule; Please see: Novaro and Palermo, *La Dictadura Militar*, 461.

⁶⁸ Juan de Onis, “Pope’s Rights Plea Shakes Argentines: Papers, Silent on Critical O.A.S. Report, Give Wide Coverage to Appeal on Prisoners,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1979, p. A5.

documented some of the early abuse.⁶⁹ On the one hand, the Catholic church made significant attempts on behalf of missing people and their families, but on the other, it was one of the institutions which has since been indicted for its involvement—in providing a religious justification for the abuses and otherwise—in the coup.⁷⁰

International reporting on Argentina also fluctuated, the significance of which can be seen in coverage of the 1978 FIFA World Cup. After the coup of March 24, 1976, international reports followed the cues of local Argentine writers, celebrating the coup as a “new start” for the country.⁷¹ Pre-coup unrest in Argentina had registered in international reporting such as the *New York Times*, capturing both the economic turmoil (noting the peso was devalued by 70 percent in one day) and the signs of civil war.⁷² Despite the signs of increasing violence,⁷³ international reporters still allowed the military junta extreme leeway:

⁶⁹ Catholic Church, Conferencia Argentina. *Documentos del Episcopado Argentino sobre la violencia, 1970–1977*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Clarentina, 1977.

⁷⁰ Mignone, Emilio F. *Iglesia y dictadura: El Papel de la iglesia a la luz de sus relaciones con el regimen militar*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1986; Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998). Patricia Marchak lists these letters in her bibliography, all written by the Agencia Informativa Católica Argentina (AICA)... The titles of these letters are fascinating: ‘Carta de la comisión permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina al Presidente Videla, sobre la ‘situación de los detenidos, con motivo de la próxima navidad,’ 3 December 1976; ‘Carta de la comisión permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina a los miembros de la Junta Militar, sobre inquietudes del pueblo cristiano, por detenidos, desaparecidos, etc...’ 17 March 1977; Reflexión cristiana para el pueblo de la patria de la Conferencia Argentina,” San Miguel, 7 May 1977.

⁷¹ “Argentina’s New Start,” *New York Times*, 4 April 1976, p. E 14. According to Marguerite Feitlowitz many international editorials congratulated Argentina on the coup. *The Globe and Mail*, to its credit, was less laudatory, “Argentina can now expect a time of repressive and authoritarian rule....The coup can be expected to lead to an intensified military crusade against the Marxist terrorists responsible for a heavy toll of kidnappings and murders.” *The Globe and Mail*, 25 March 1976, p.9.

⁷² Juan de Onís, “Argentina Announces an Emergency Economic Plan,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1976, p. 6; Juan de Onís, “Argentina is at the Crisis Point,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1976, p. 3; Juan de Onís, “Political Killings in Argentina Rise: 40 are Slain in a Week by Rightists and Leftists in a Least Six Cities,” *New York Times*, 22 March 1976, p. 6.

⁷³ Juan de Onís, “Argentina Fighting Both Leftist Subversion and Counterterrorism by Right,” *New York Times*, 28 June 1976, p. 12.

The good intentions for even-handed justice of President Jorge Rafael Videla and the officers of his circle seem always to be frustrated by military and police officials outside the ruling junta.⁷⁴

Under-reporting of the violence typified the first year of the international press on the military junta.

The international news media changed its tone, however, when international bodies like Amnesty International started to release reports of human rights abuses in Argentina. US economic aid was rescinded on February 24, 1977, after the Carter Administration cited concerns over human-rights abuses in the country.⁷⁵ Reports on human rights abuses by Amnesty International began in November of 1976 with the *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina, 6-15 November, 1976*. Similar reports were released in most years of the coup, with a flood of reports being released in 1979. Titles included *Repression against intellectuals in Argentina*, (1977), *The 'disappeared' of Argentina: list of cases reported to Amnesty International, March 1976 – 1979*, (1979), *The Missing children of Argentina*, (1979) and *Argentina: pregnant women who have disappeared while in detention*, (1980).⁷⁶ The United States also conducted its own fact-finding missions into the disappearances, presenting its findings to

⁷⁴ “‘Madness’ in Argentina,” *New York Times*, 28 August 1976, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Juan de Onis, “Argentina Says Carter Interferes,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1977.

⁷⁶ Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina, 6-15 November, 1976*, London: Amnesty International Publications, 1977; Amnesty International, *Repression against intellectuals in Argentina*, London: Amnesty International, 1977; Amnesty International. *Argentina repression of the media since the military coup of 24 March, 1976* (London: Amnesty International, 1978; Amnesty International, *Argentina: repression against members of the legal profession, 1975-1977*, London: Amnesty International, 1978; Amnesty International, *The 'disappeared' of Argentina: list of cases reported to Amnesty International, March 1976 – 1979*, London: Amnesty International, 1979; Amnesty International, *Argentina: action for disappeared: information and actions on 22 missing persons*, London: Amnesty International, 1979 ; Amnesty International, *Violations of human rights in Argentina missing prisoners: Who is going to speak for them?*, London: Amnesty International, 1979; Amnesty International, *The Missing children of Argentina*, London: Amnesty International, 1979 ; Amnesty International, *Testimony on Secret Detention Camps in Argentina*, London: amnesty International, 1980; Amnesty International, *Argentina: pregnant women who have disappeared while in detention*, Ottawa: Amnesty International, 1980.

Congressional Sub-committees throughout the late 1970s.⁷⁷ There is, not surprisingly, an irony to this display of commitment to human rights in Argentina. Recently released memoranda of conversations between the Department of State and Argentine foreign minister, Admiral Cesar Augusto Guzzetti, reveal that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was fully aware of the human rights abuses going on in Argentina. Kissinger simply requested that the military hurry their anti-subversive campaign and conclude it before Congress got back into session.⁷⁸ In 1980, the OAS presented another report on human rights abuses in Argentina.⁷⁹ It was, in part, pressure from international organizations like Amnesty International and the OAS and foreign media that exacerbated an ideological parting of ways within the Argentine military. Military men with a more liberal bent began to voice their distaste for the ongoing abuse of political prisoners, which amounted to a significant easing of repression throughout the country as the decade came to a close.

Another important call for international reporting of the disappearances in Argentina came from *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the group which most epitomizes Argentine grassroots human rights organizations. The FIFA World Cup of 1978 was a key moment in the military dictatorship because all the world (and all the world's journalists) descended upon the nation for the chilly month of June. Formed in April

⁷⁷ See *Human Rights in Argentina: Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations*, House of Representatives, 94th Cong., 2d Sess. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976. A later report was also released: *Review of United States Policy on Military Assistance to Argentina: Hearing before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations and on Inter-American Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, House of Representatives, 97th Cong., 1st Sess. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981.

⁷⁸ Fernando Rondon (notetaker) "Subject: Foreign Minister Guzzetti Euphoric Over visit to United States," U.S. State Department, *Argentina Declassification Project (1975-1984)*, August 20, 2002. *National Security Archive*, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB104/index.htm>

⁷⁹ Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina*. Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, 1980.

1977, *Las Madres* did their best to capture the attention of those journalists. Hebe de Bonafini and Matilde Sánchez, two of the founding members of *Las Madres* wrote:

And the World Cup began: Argentine flags, confetti thrown from every office window.... While local channels like ATC were showing the joyous flight of hundreds of doves in the stadium, most of the journalists were with us in the Plaza de Mayo, covering the flip side of the Argentine coin: 'Boycotting the World Cup.'⁸⁰

This extract captures the determinism of *Las Madres* and the effective indifference the military regime had manufactured by its daily manipulation of the media and grand fiestas such as the World Cup. According to writer/translator Marguerite Feitlowitz, "the World Soccer Championship erupted in scandal when foreign journalists and representatives aggressively pressed the generals on allegations of disappearance and torture."⁸¹ From about 1977 onwards, international dailies started to mention the complaints of unjustly held political prisoners and human rights abuses and the World Cup provided ample opportunity for international media outlets to do their own investigations.

The Dirty War and the plight of *los desaparecidos* thus appeared as a current event in the international press and as a political theme to be negotiated in local artistic productions in the final years of dictatorship. With the election of Raúl Alfonsín in 1983, these discursive venues—and the message itself—changed drastically. Whereas music and theatre had made do with metaphoric and symbolic representations of the dictatorship, following 1983, Argentines turned to non-fictional representations of the dictatorship years. Newspapers, courtroom reports, government-funded truth

⁸⁰ Hebe de Bonafini and Matilde Sánchez, "The Madwomen of Plaza de Mayo," in *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela R. Montaldo (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 437.

⁸¹ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 150.

commissions, Radio shows, and all manners of TV programs took over analysis of the Dirty War. Artistic examinations of the period slowed down; for example, the new style of theatre—*Teatro Abierto*—lost its social relevance once it appeared to Argentines that the country's institutions might provide an adequate judgement of the period. In large part, rock music abandoned dictatorship as a central theme. While rockers like Gieco and García continued to play music they had composed during the 1970s, new musicians reaped the rewards of democracy by embracing a wide-open thematic spectrum. Bands like Soda Stereo sung about dancing and technology, while others sung about homosexuality and AIDS and the emerging barrio rockers sung about poverty, hyperinflation, and issues which plagued only the lower classes.

While the literature which deals with the Dirty War in Argentina is vast, I have highlighted here just the aspects which will be shown to be pertinent to a study of how rock music has become one of the pillars for memory of dictatorship in Argentina. Other studies such as those which claim the Dirty War was a result of United States foreign policy (militarily and economically) during the Cold War bear little influence on this study.⁸² Some scholars have focused on the legacy of dictatorship and the weakness of Argentine institutions, while others have placed more emphasis on the role of the economy, some saying the Dirty War was a way to appease anti-communist financiers in the United States while others claim it was a war between classes that brought much benefit to the upper classes in Argentina.⁸³

⁸² Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 7; see also: Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History*, 26-27.

⁸³ For more information on the war between classes, Ana Maria Marini, "Women in Contemporary Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives* 4.4 (Autumn, 1977), 120. And Carlos Waisman and Mónica Peralta-Ramos, *From Military Rule to Liberal Democracy in Argentina* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987).

When, in 1983, Argentina finally returned to democratic rule, social commentators naturally wondered whether or not Argentina was culturally, socially or politically equipped to deal with democracy, or whether it was simply an inherently authoritarian nation. In 1984, Ernesto Sábato, in his opening remarks to the 1984 *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP), said of the pre-dictatorship period that:

In the years that preceded the coup d'état of 1976, there were acts of terrorism which no civilized community could justify. Citing these deeds, the military dictatorship unleashed a terrorism infinitely worse because the army, a gigantic power with the total impunity allowed under an absolute state, started an infernal witch-hunt in which not only the terrorists but also thousands and thousands of innocent persons paid with their lives.⁸⁴

In this statement, Sábato uses impassioned language to emphasize the disproportionate response of the military to guerrilla activity and to argue that the majority of the military's victims were innocent.⁸⁵ However, the narrative of the innocent victim ignored the systemic causes of unrest in Argentina prior to the coup and created a kind of *tabula rasa* where in Argentine history could begin again in 1983. This is similar to the central paradox of nationalist founding myths discussed by Benedict Anderson wherein there is a "need to forget acts of violence central to state formation that can never be forgotten."⁸⁶ In any case, the question of innocence versus guilt is a kind of red herring, for no amount of guilty involvement in subversive activity would have justified the inhumane treatment that the military typically administered to their victims. If the narrative of innocence is meant to capture this truism, then so be it, but for the question of remembering the past,

⁸⁴ Knudson, "Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983," 95.

⁸⁵ Novaro and Palermo, *La Dictadura Militar*, 487.

⁸⁶ Greg Grandin is paraphrasing Anderson in his article, "The Instruction of Great Catastrophe: Truth Commissions, National History and State Formation in Argentina, Chile and Guatemala," *The American Historical Review* (February 2005).

the narrative of innocence disrupts understanding of the complex nature of 1960s and 1970s Argentina. Even *Las Madres* have had to face the question of innocence. If they imagine their children as innocent victims, they died for nothing. If, however, they remember that their children died for a cause, then *Las Madres* can continue in a fight not only for their memory but also for their cause.⁸⁷

Building on the capacity of Argentine grassroots movements, a new body of scholarship has developed in the past ten years. Memory—be it personal, institutional, corporate or cultural—has taken hold in discourse about dictatorship in recent years. According to Elizabeth Jelin,

Up to the mid-1980s, human rights activists and organizations felt the urgency of learning and publicizing the nature of the massive and systematic violations of human rights during the military dictatorship—the demand for ‘truth’—and of seeing that the guilty were punished—the demand for ‘justice.’ Since then, the claims have been extended to include the vindication of the historical and collective memory struggling against oblivion.⁸⁸

It is in this context that the important connections between rock music, protest and dictatorship have been rejuvenated. With state-imposed impunity and a powerless judiciary, music and art took on new importance.

Broadly speaking, memory scholarship can be divided into three categories. First, beginning in 1981 with the publication of newspaper editor Jacobo Timerman’s *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell without a Number*, personal memoirs and testimonies have played an important role in articulating the experiences of both those who were detained and

⁸⁷ Mark Osiel notes that the leader of *Las Madres*, Hebe de Bonafini, made such a discursive shift in 1979 when she stopped characterizing her disappeared sons as simply idealists, and started to characterize them as revolutionaries whose cause (inspired by Cuba) she would continue to defend. Please see: Mark J. Osiel, “Constructing Subversion in Argentina’s Dirty War,” in *Representations*, Summer, 2001), 127.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Jelin, “The Politics of Memory: The Human Rights Movements and the Construction of Democracy in Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 39.

those who were left behind.⁸⁹ Andrés Jaroslavsky, *The Future of Memory*, published in 2004, provides a worthy bookend to this important segment of testimonial-as-memory literature, in that it discusses the memories of children whose parents were disappeared.⁹⁰ A second category moves beyond the personal to collective memories. Though not written in collectives, these books often carry more ideological weight because of the corporate body represented by their authors. Illustrative examples are: *Hebe, Memoria y Esperanza: conversando con las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, co-written by Alejandro Diago and Hebe de Bonafina the leader of *Las Madres*;⁹¹ Domingo Varone's *La memoria obrera: testimonios de un militante* and Chaves and Lewinger's *Los del 73: memoria montonera* which both address the oft-neglected memory of pre-coup militancy. Finally, we find two juxtaposing recollections of governance: former dictator Reynaldo B. A. Bignone wrote *El último de facto: la liquidación del Proceso: memoria y testimonio* and the first president to be elected at the return to democracy, Raúl Alfonsín, has written *Memoria política: transición a la democracia y derechos humanos*.⁹² Both Bignone and Alfonsín have a dual representational role: they are the individual incarnations of opposing governing bodies. Works like these, and there are many, have begun to give voice to the historic dimensions of pre-coup ideological conflicts; of the development of

⁸⁹ Timerman, *Prisoner without a Name*.

⁹⁰ Andrés Jaroslavsky, *The Future of Memory* (London: Latin America Bureau, 2004).

⁹¹ Alejandro Diago and Hebe de Bonafini, *Hebe, memoria y esperanza: conversando con las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Dialéctica, 1988).

⁹² Domingo Varone, *La memoria obrera: testimonios de un militante* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cartago, 1989); Reynaldo B. A. Bignone, *El último de facto: la liquidación del Proceso: memoria y testimonio* (Buenos Aires: PLANETA, 1992); Gonzalo Leónidas Chaves and Jorge Omar Lewinger, *Los del 73: memoria montonera* (La Plata: Editorial de la Campana, 1998); Raúl Alfonsín, *Memoria política: transición a la democracia y derechos humanos* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina, 2004).

a strong human rights contingent; and, finally, of the varying governmental stances whose shadow still falls on Argentina today.

The third body of scholarship on memory of dictatorship looks beyond the personal and corporate incarnations of memory to the marks this era has made on culture. Since about 1995, scholars have taken up the study of the impact of dictatorship on Argentine cultural industries such as cinema, theatre, literature, art, and finally, music.⁹³ These studies have captured the impact dictatorship had on the arts, some of which (cinema in particular) suffered great losses as talented individuals fled the country never to return. Rock music has received short shrift in this scholarship.

While some of these works, such as Elizabeth Jelin's *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, do make occasional reference to the role of popular cultural in commemoration of the past, for the most part this is a significant gap in the scholarship. One recent work, *The Art of Truth-Telling About Authoritarian Rule* provides an important, though cursory, foray into the important ways in which "visual art, rumor, music, film, humor, performance and memory sites take their place with story as modes of truth-telling."⁹⁴ As the introduction to this book says,

unofficial truths about the authoritarian period are socially transformative when they enter (and sometimes even create) a new public discourse about events of the violent past. Without fanfare, invisible to those unattuned to them, unofficial

⁹³ See, for example, Fernando Ferreira, *Luz, cámara--memoria: una historia social del cine argentino* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1995), Francisco Javier Millán, *La memoria agitada: cine y represión en Chile y Argentina* (Madrid: Ocho y Medio, Libros de Cine, 2001), Jean Graham Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theater Under Dictatorship* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), Pablo de Santis, *El teatro de la memoria* (Argentina: Planeta, 2000), Centro Cultural Recoleta, *La desaparición: memoria, arte y política: libro de artista* (Buenos Aires: Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Histórico Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2000), Marcos Aguinis and Manuela Fingueret, Pujol, *Rock y dictadura, Barbarie y memoria: fragmentos de testimonios, ficción, poesía y ensayo del Holocausto y la dictadura argentina (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 2000).

⁹⁴ Ksenija Bilbija et al., eds., *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 5.

discourses of truth shift people's perceptions as effectively as any official process or account will do.⁹⁵

For many years, *rock nacional* would have qualified only as a repository for unofficial truths. However, in the past decade, as human rights and democratic discourse about memory dictatorship has come together, *rock nacional* has brought its socially transformative power to national venues such as the seat of government, the Casa Rosada, and the presidential palace at 5 de Olivos. Susana Kaiser's work, *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the "Dirty War,"* provides a provocative foray into the multiple ways that young generations of Argentines are learning about the dictatorship era. Kaiser's study is based on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory which:

describe[s] the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as the stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right.⁹⁶

Unlike Jaroslavsky's book which addresses the memories of individuals who would classify as direct victims (they saw their parents disappear and experienced their absence), Kaiser is discussing individuals who had no direct experience with the terror but who have taken on those memories as part of their identity. As public figures in Argentina have rallied to the cause of commemorating the dirty war, I argue that more and more Argentines have developed their own postmemories of terror.

The rise of memory as a means of atoning for the dictatorial past, apart from reflecting a worldwide trend in academic study, reflects the failure of Argentine courts

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶ Marianne Hirsch, "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Dartmouth College: University Press of New England, 1999), 8.

and governments to provide an adequate judicial response. Where in the dictatorship, citizens and artists were forced to rely on metaphor and silence as a way of coping with censorship, in the post-dictatorship era, Argentines have had to rely on hand-made memorials, insistent marches, and realist art to cope with state-imposed oblivion. As such, the creative evasions which dominated *rock nacional* lyrics under the dictatorship made way for songs which tended to be either playfully carefree (some might say vacuous) or blatantly recriminating of Argentine institutions which had failed the nation.

Chapter Two

Rock Nacional: A nuanced resistance

Out of a fantastic cast of characters including *Señor Tijeras*, *Los Mosquitos*, a large spider, a young girl named Alicia and some dinosaurs, Argentine rock musicians crafted a lasting monument to the Dirty War. This chapter traces the early history of rock music in Argentina, noting the coining of the specialized term *rock nacional*, introducing key rock musicians - Charly García and León Gieco - and exploring the way in which they transformed the concert stage into a political platform by staking claims as purveyors of the authentic in the age of dictatorship. Like elsewhere in the world, rock music in Argentina began as a subculture with an epicenter in the capital city, Buenos Aires. While at first glance this *porteño*-centric music scene would seem to speak only to the experiences of urban youth, a vast number of rockers migrated to Buenos Aires, bringing sounds and stories of the countryside to the big city.¹ Charly García and León Gieco epitomize, respectively, urban and rural voices in popular rock music. The subculture of the early years evolved, in the 1970s, to become an important youth movement that planted its feet in defiance of dictatorships, and earned, in the 1980s, a mass audience composed of two generations of music fans.

Despite the coeval rise of rock music and descent of Argentina into dictatorship, this chapter will not simply explore the history of music under oppression. In this chapter, I ask these questions: What kind of experience did rock musicians have during dictatorship? What story does rock music tell of life under dictatorship? What is omitted

¹ Residents of Buenos Aires are called *porteños* because Buenos Aires is a port city.

from this story? How was this message communicated, and to whom? What were the consequences of participation in this culture? How is the voice of rock music different from that of other cultural products at the time? The answers to these questions will be found in song lyrics and fan-letters, in narrations of the concert experience and in academic scholarship. It is with the privilege of hind-sight that I know how important these musicians and *rock nacional* has become in Argentina's national heritage and, in particular, how it has come to relate to commemoration of dictatorship. In looking to the dictatorship era, I argue that we are looking at the building blocks of a monument that commemorates the experience of youth during the Dirty War. This chapter will illustrate how *rock nacional* became a *lieu de mémoire*,² making monuments of song to which generations of Argentines can, and do, return.

Rock nacional has inspired a great deal of literature – both academic and popular – since 1965. Scholarship on the role of rock music in Argentine society owes a particular debt to both British and U.S. theories of rock music where it became the subject of much scholarship since the rise of cultural studies in the 1970s. Writing in 1984 about the rock music and youth culture in 1960s Britain, rock music scholar Simon Frith said:

Rock, in other words, described a more ambitious music than pop, in terms of form, content and impact. Rock ideologues (in *Rolling Stone*, for example) wrote about records' political and poetic significance; rock musicians both represented a subversive community (making the public sounds of the youth counterculture) and realized complex private dreams and feeling.³

² Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* is a pivotal concept in current memory scholarship and helpful for this study because it considers both tangible (stone monuments) and intangible *lieux* (the idea of *liberté* for example) to be important in collective memory. See: Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1996).

³ Simon Frith, "Rock and the Politics of Memory," *Social Text*, no. 9/10 (Spring 1984), 60.

Music scholar, Lawrence Grossberg, criticizes both Frith and another scholar, Dick Hebdige, for their allegiance to class as a construct which defines taste. Grossberg, instead, is interested in the way in which rock generates an audience that cuts across class, and how it “provides strategies of survival and pleasure for its fans, [and] with the ways in which rock and roll is empowered by and empowers particular audiences in particular contexts.”⁴ Argentina’s rock music audience only really became divided along class lines after the end of dictatorship, in 1983. Prior to that—in part because variety was limited and in part because rock concerts and festivals were so big—audiences were less likely to be segregated along class lines. Furthermore, at the close of rock concerts, alliances—irrespective of class—became important survival mechanisms in the face a common enemy, the police squadrons stationed at stadium exits.

While British and American approaches have certainly grounded this study, rebellious rock musicians in Argentina had much more at stake than their Northern counterparts like Johnny B. Rotten. As such, scholars who have looked at rock music in Russia, the Czech Republic and China have all provided added depth to this thesis.⁵ Tony Mitchell’s article “Mixing Pop and Politics,” notes the important role that rock music played as a form of dissent in communist Czechoslovakia, and the way in which it has been incorporated into the social humanist leadership of Václav Havel, the president who called in Frank Zappa to manage trade, culture and tourism in his country.⁶ Alex Yurchak’s *Everything Was Forever Until it was No More* includes underground Russian

⁴⁴ Lawrence Grossberg, “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life,” *Popular Music* 4 (1984), 227.

⁵ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005),.

⁶ Tony Mitchell, “Mixing Pop and Politics: Rock Music in Czechoslovakia before and after the Velvet Revolution,” *Popular Music* 11, no. 2 (May 1992), 189.

rock music among the reasons why the late socialist generation adapted so quickly to the sudden collapse of communism.⁷ Though to a different end, hopeful Argentine scholars have sought and found, in *rock nacional*, indications that youth growing up in dictatorship-era Argentina were committed to democratic ideals.

Within Argentina, *rock nacional* has been studied from a variety of perspectives and the above prominent scholars—Simon Frith and Lawrence Grossberg in particular—are regularly quoted. In his work, sociologist Pablo Vila, drew heavily from English subculture analysis and later realized the limits of this analysis:

In the case of my first work, one could say that I committed the sin of a ‘sociologism’, drawing with thick lines certain social actors (youth, the military etcetera), ascribing to them certain interests linked to their social position and relating those to certain well-defined musical expressions that I assumed ‘represented them’ given the monolithic structural position they supposedly held.⁸

Vila’s ‘sociologistic’ analysis, however, has had prescriptive influence on the way many Argentines write about the influence of class on rock music popularity. Studying music, according to Jorge Monteleone, must never neglect the body of the rocker and the community in which one can rock out:

The beat multiplies, communally, at the concert, where the beat of the band reverberates in all of the bodies present. In the rhythm one produces rocker tribality, his non-institutional sociability. Rhythm, body, language: the combination of these elements in time, could describe a history of rock, from political affiliations, the clothing, the lyrics or the sound which includes technique.⁹

Monteleone’s article “Cuerpo Constellado: Sobre la poesía del rock argentino,” builds on

⁷ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

⁸ Pablo Vila, “Identidades narrativas y música: Una primera propuesta para entender sus relaciones,” *Revista Transcultural de Música/ Transcultural Music Review* 2 (1996).

⁹ Jorge Monteleone, “Cuerpo constelado: sobre la poesía de “rock” argentino,” *Caudernos Hispanoamericanos* 517-519 (July - Sept 1993), 402.

scholarship that has focused on literary analysis of song lyrics as well as the sociological studies which have emphasised the importance of the temporary community that is created by a concert stadium or underground bar. Apart from sociological and literary approaches,¹⁰ other writers emphasize the history of the movement by conducting chronological investigations,¹¹ or write about the growth of specific artists, usually constructing biographies of their lives.¹² In the past decade, with the passing of the 30th anniversary of the first Argentina rock band's first hit ("La Balsa" by Los Gatos Salvajes), a new string of books documenting the history of the entire movement have been released.¹³

In connection with this commemoration of the early years of rock music, a parallel movement has pushed for Argentines to remember the dictatorship. The most recent books published about this music have actually brought the two commemorations together, as in Sergio Pujol's *Rock y dictadura: crónica de una generación (1976-1983)*. What this scholarship is missing, however, is a careful analysis of what is being remembered in these studies that have begun connecting dictatorship with rock—one of the few cultural products able to withstand, and even thrive, in dictatorial conditions.

¹⁰ Please see: Pablo Vila, "Rock Nacional, Crónicas de la Resistencia Juvenil," in *Los nuevos movimientos sociales /1 Mujeres. Rock nacional*. (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, S.A., 1985), Pablo Vila, "Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina," *Popular Music* 6, no. 2 (May 1987), Vila, "Argentina's 'Rock Nacional'," Monteleone, "Cuerpo Constelado," 401-420.

¹¹ Please see: Miguel Grinberg, *La música progresiva argentina: Como vino la mano* (Buenos Aires: Distal, 1993), Marcelo Fernández Bitar, *Historia del Rock en Argentina: Una Investigación Cronológica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones el Juglar, 1987), Darío Quintana and Eduardo de la Puente, *Todo Vale: Antología Analizada de la Poesía Rock Argentina desde 1965* (Buenos Aires: Distal, 1996), and Berti, *Rockologia*.

¹² There are numerous examples of biographic texts. See, for example: Sergio Marchi, *No digas nada: Una vida de Charly García* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1997), Oscar Muñoz, *Serú Girán: No llores por mí* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Distal SRL, 1992), Oscar Finkelstein, *León Gieco: Crónica de un sueño* (Buenos Aires: Editora AC, 1994), Antonelli, *Gatos Salvajes 1965*.

¹³ Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, Kozak, *Rock en Letras*, Alfredo Beltrán Fuentes, *La ideología antiautoritaria del rock nacional* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989), Osvaldo Marzullo and Pancho Muñoz, "Historia del 'rock' nacional: algo más que música, algo más que ruido," *Todo es Historia* 19, no. 239 (April 1987),

Dictatorship musicians were, for many youth, key purveyors of political analysis and current events. As songwriters, they were careful editors and crafted a national identity that was both an example of resistance and participation in the values promoted by the dictatorship it was supposedly resisting.

The rise of *rock nacional* in the context of dictatorship is one central part of its history that continues to leave its mark in commemorative and “Best of” albums. The first rock musicians in Argentina, Los Gatos Salvajes, produced their first album in 1965 and two years later produced their first hit single, “La Balsa.”¹⁴ According to music specialist, Claudia Kozak, Litto Nebbia’s band illustrates the first characteristic of *rock nacional*:

The path taken by Litto Nebbia – the best example of this option – was from English to Spanish (his group stopped calling itself The Wild Cats, becoming *Los Gatos Salvajes* and later simply *Los Gatos*).¹⁵

Rock journalist, Marcelo Fernandez Bitar, says:

the new thing that these *rosinaros* [Group from Rosario] did was in 1965 they expressed experiences that communicated the life of young people, thereby creating an automatic generational reference.¹⁶

Instead of reproducing themes from what Fernández Bitar calls ‘rock anglosajon,’ Los Gatos Salvajes had produced the first strictly Argentine rock, paving the way for the best of that genre: *rock nacional*. When their hit, “La Balsa,” was released, it sold “200 mil placas y unas 20 versiones de distintos intérpretes.[200 thousand discs and 20 distinct interpretations.]”¹⁷ Incidentally, it also marked the dawn of censorship in Argentine rock: RCA determined that the original lyrics composed by Tanguito (Pipo Lernaut) were too

¹⁴ Fernández Bitar, *Historia del Rock en Argentina*, 10-11.

¹⁵ Kozak, *Rock en Letras*, 23.

¹⁶ Bitar, *Historia del Rock en Argentina*, 102.

¹⁷ Kozak, *Rock en Letras*, 10.

harsh, and so the line “Estoy muy solo y triste acá en este mundo de mierda [I am alone and sad here in this world of shit]” became “Estoy muy solo y triste acá en este mundo abandonado [I am sad and alone in this abandoned world].”¹⁸ Likewise, “Ayer Nomás,” which was released alongside “La Balsa” on the same single (*simple*), also underwent similar revisions.¹⁹ And so, songs which situated Argentine youth in a world of shit were revised into love songs for the sake of the recording companies, thus foreshadowing later, stricter requirements which would be imposed on rock bands during the dictatorship.

This doctoring of the music for the sake of market morality did not go un-noticed within the music industry. In the early 1970s, an editor for the newly launched rock magazine *Pelo* (Hair) complained:

The mass public is a ridiculous crowd that follows whatever they broadcast with tiresome insistence. Seventy five percent of the albums recorded in Argentina are only black disks.²⁰

He went on to blame not only the recording companies but the press as well:

Everything seems to be organized: eighty percent of the press (magazines, radio, TV) that refer to the world of entertainment, and therefore to music, are integrated complacent [thinkers]: they promote invented idols who are made by the force of Money which then creates a public. ...²¹

Daniel Ripoll’s complaint that seventy-five percent of Argentine albums were “solamente placas negras” illustrates two things: first, that there was, in 1970, a divide between music created solely for the market and music created for the sake of music and second, that this divide was publicly discussed in fan magazines such as *Pelo*, a magazine which released its first copy in 1970 and continued to be published well into the 1990s. This

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ Daniel Ripoll, “Buzones en Venta” *Pelo*, II, 18 circa 1971, p.6. Quoted in the Appendix to Alfredo Beltrán Fuentes, *La ideología antiautoritaria del rock nacional* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989), 85.

²¹ Idem.

tirade would have also served an additional purpose in that Ripoll likely wanted to distinguish his own publication from the rest of his market-driven, complacent competitors. This divide, between “los complacientes” and the real, rare, figure of a musician would become one of the defining characteristics of what rock music specialist, Miguel Grinberg first christened ‘la musica progresiva argentina’ and later called, simply, “*rock nacional*.”²²

While one characteristic of *rock nacional* is linguistic, there are numerous additional characteristics that have made this music exceptional in the eyes of generations of musicians and their fans.²³ According to sociologist Pablo Vila, above and beyond Spanish, factors of distribution, content, and form all serve to define music as *rock nacional*. One lasting characteristic of *rock nacional* is its most pivotal feature: its claim on authenticity. The term ‘authentic’ is notoriously difficult to define and is often employed in combination with other supposedly ahistorical terms such as ‘traditional.’ Here I am interested in the fact of its usage and the evolution of what has indicated authenticity to various generations of rock music fans. As the editor for *Pelo* pointed out above, the vast majority of rock music being produced in 1970s Argentina was created for the sole intention of selling it. Typically, these bands found their way to the market through the reliable means of television and radio promotions; *rock nacional*, in contrast, found its audience in the concert stadium.²⁴ The concert stadium allowed for another defining characteristic of *rock nacional*: what commentators would call an ‘authenticity’

²² The issue of ‘los complacientes’ is discussed in virtually all of the literature I’ve read on the topic of rock music in Argentina prior to the coup. See especially: Beltrán Fuentes, *La ideología antiautoritaria del rock nacional*, 48-49; Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, 44, and Vila, “Argentina’s “Rock Nacional,””.

²³ Thus, for example, a recent retrospective of Los Gatos Salvajes makes no claims to their status as *rock nacional*. Mario Antonelli’s book is called *Los Gatos Salvajes: 1965-2005: 40 años de rock de autor en castellano*.

²⁴ Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, 75.

in the content of the lyrics. Musicians whose albums had been severely censored by recording companies could use the stage to undermine their edits. León Gieco's most censored album was *El fantasma de Canterville*, of which ten of its twelve songs were either prohibited or partially censored by COMFER (*Comité Federal de Radiodifusión* [Federal Broadcasting Commission]).²⁵ The most striking example was:

The song after which the LP was named [originally] had the verse: "I have died many times/ bombarded in the city" and [it] had to be replaced by "I have died many times/ on my knees in the city." *But the public didn't care.* In live presentations, the people sang the song in its original version.²⁶ (*Italics mine*)

Like feminists whose 'Mother Art in Heaven,' the audience, as a mass, could reject the censors' doctrine by subverting the lyrics; musicians often used the stage to do the same. Examples like these highlight the absolute importance of the stage, of the fact that these musicians were *live* (and life) to their audiences. Because bands like Los Gatos built up their fan-base through the release of singles, they did not have the un-mediated connection to their audience which performers like Charly García and León Gieco had.²⁷ The military came to target musicians whose popularity was based upon concerts specifically because those venues allowed musicians to escape the silencing mechanisms of recording companies. A literary analysis of the lyrics will further establish the way in which musicians became important popular history-makers in the dictatorship era.

This claim to authenticity has proven important in the construction of *rock nacional* as Argentina's rock. By linking this subgenre of rock music in Argentina to a

²⁵ León Gieco, *Fantasma de Canterville*, 1974. See the Appendix for a full translation of the lyrics.

²⁶ León Gieco: *Cronica de un sueño*, 53. De la Puente and Quintana note the same censorship-inspired difference between stage performances and recordings of Gieco's "Chacateras dragones." For more information see: *Todo Vale*, 103.

²⁷ Though at first blush *Los Gatos* were lauded for singing in Spanish, it wasn't until 1969 that "...se edita 'Beat No 1', primer placa de los 'nuevos' Gatos, menos superficiales (si se admite que alguna vez lo fueron)..." (Marcelo Bitar Fernández, *Historia del Rock en Argentina*, 39).

so-called real-life experience, music fans have been able to elevate this music to a level of un-touchability. Musicians like García and Gieco have become the yardstick against which later generations of musicians have been measured. Furthermore, in situating 'the authentic' within the purview of *rock nacional*, the term itself has gained a sacrosanct dimension, and its seal has won affirmation for select musicians by way of inclusion in "Best of" albums and in books which focus specifically on this music. These include recent publications such as Alejandro Rozotchner's *Escuchá qué Tema: La filosofía del rock nacional* and Sergio Pujol's *Rock y Dictadura: Crónica de una generación*, released in 2005.²⁸

An additional way in which *rock nacional* musicians authenticated their music can be found in its form, a form which is quite difficult to pin down. Unlike rock music in English, *rock nacional* is fusion music, bringing in elements of Argentine tango and folklore to create an altogether unpredictable sound. Pablo Vila discusses the particularities of this fusion:

rock nacional was always fusion music, but that fusion was mostly done from the point of view of the organic, middle-class intellectuals of the genre.... In this regard, for the traditional *rock nacional*, tango was equated with Astor Piazzolla (practitioner of a highly 'intellectual' version of tango) and not with Alberto Castillo (a very 'non-intellectual' one), and folklore with Domingo Cura (a folklorist highly influenced by jazz), but not with José Larralde (a very traditional folklore musician).²⁹

In this article Vila *et al.* point out the urban middle class origins of *rock nacional*, but there are other connections between tango and rock music that warrant mention. For

²⁸ Alejandro Rozitchner, *Escuchá Qué Tema: la filosofía del rock nacional* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2003), and Pujol, *Rock y dictadura*.

²⁹ Pablo Vila, Pablo Semán, and Cecilia Benedetti, "Neoliberalism and Rock in the Popular Sectors of Contemporary Argentina," in *Rockin' Las Americas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latin/O America (Illuminations: Cultural Formations of the Americas)*, edited by Deborah Pacini Hernandez, Hector Fernandez L'Hoeste, and Eric Zolov: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 279.

example, one rather tendentious music specialist, Marcelo Olivieri, recalled the following anecdote:

A few months ago I was interviewed for a Chilean TV program and they asked me who would be the Gardel of *rock criollo*. With a poker-face, I answered that Gardel was, is and will be the number one. There will never be a rocker or artist of another genre who could reach him. The journalist couldn't believe that someone who wrote about rock could answer this way.³⁰

Calling Carlos Gardel, known as the father of tango, the best rock musician was a playful way of drawing attention to the various ways in which rock has borrowed from that tradition of music. One of the most significant ways, no doubt, is in the use of slang in rock music. In Buenos Aires, a very specific slang has developed since the days of tango dancing in the early 1900's. *Lunfardo* is often considered to be the language of the thieves and poor tango dancers of Buenos Aires streets at the turn of the last century. But the current president of *La Academia Porteño del Lunfardo*, José Gobello, argues: "Aquel vocabulario cosmopolita, menos hijo de la cárcel que de la inmigración, resistió a pie firme el sostenido embate de los gramáticos y de la pituquería intelectual. [That cosmopolitan vocabulary, less a child of the jail than of immigration, firmly resisted the sustained invasión of the grammar of the matchbox intellectual."³¹ This *porteño* slang—replete with borrowings from Italian—*laburo* means a job instead of the Spanish *trabajo*—to slave terminology—*palenque*, an escaped slave community, can be both a brothel and a general mess—is both absolutely cosmopolitan *and* absolutely Argentine.

Just as *lunfardo* embodies the seemingly contradictory nature of an Argentine identity that is at once fiercely nationalistic and absolutely cosmopolitan, *rock nacional*

³⁰ José Gobello and Marcelo H. Oliveri, *Tanqueces y Lunfardismos del Rock Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 2001), 13.

³¹ Ibid, 15.

embodies similar contradictions. First, its name suggests a sort of nationalism, despite obvious borrowings from both American and British music. For example, one of León Gieco's first big hits, "Hombres de Hierro" [Men of Steel] opens with the same chords as Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," while the lyrics speak about Argentine industrial workers.³² Secondly, it came to be known as *rock nacional* at a time when it was resisting the dominant vision of the nation as envisioned by the military junta. That rock musicians like Gieco, Spinetta, García and others were refuting that vision did not prevent the attempted *rapprochements* by several of the dictators. Within the music scene, it was not until 2002 that Charly García would decry what he saw as fascist implications in the term, saying he preferred his music to be considered *rock argentino*.³³

In addition to referencing middle-class musicians and tango music, however, *rock nacional* musicians also referenced the politicized *Nueva Canción* movement. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the vast majority of Latin Americans lived under dictatorial rule. In this context, a continental-wide musical movement developed which was alternatively called *Nueva Canción* (Argentina and pre-1973 Chile), *Canto Nuevo* (Chile, post-1973), *Nueva Trova* (Cuba) or *Tropicalismo* (Brasil).³⁴ This music arose in the wake of the Cuban revolution, and had close ties to traditionally oppressed populations throughout the continent. Typically left-leaning, the music gained mass followings at the same time as liberation theology took hold in much of the Catholic church throughout the continent. As such, *Nueva Canción* represented the rights of the

³² León Gieco, "Hombres de Hierro," *León Gieco*, 1973.

³³ Charly García, interview by Roque Casciero, "'Esto es rock argentino, no rock nacional'," *Página/12*, 10 February 2002.

³⁴ Nancy Morris, "Canto Porque es Necesario Cantar: The New Song Movement in Chile, 1973 - 1983," *Latin American Research Review* 21, no. 2 (1986), 118.

indigenous people and of the poor, employing folk musical traditions and often voicing the theology of the liberated church.³⁵

In Chile in 1970, newly elected president Salvador Allende often made explicit reference to the movement by commissioning songs from musicians who had trained under *Nueva Canción* pioneer, Violetta Parra.³⁶ Three years later, Pinochet's army was equally explicit when it ordered the severing of guitarist, folklorist and leader of *Nueva Canción*, Víctor Jara's hands before his execution in El Estadio Nacional in downtown Santiago de Chile. (The stadium has since been renamed in honour of him.) Despite the very small indigenous population and the limited influence of liberation theology in Argentina, it too boasted a major figure in the *Nueva Canción* movement: Mercedes Sosa. Sosa is a folk singer of world-renown and her name is synonymous with protest movements worldwide.³⁷ Sosa is a singer—her voice commands attention—but she is not a song-writer. Instead, she lends her voice to music she recognizes as protest music making her selection of songs to sing into a kind of canonization. In addition to singing León Gieco's "Solo le Pido a Dios," Charly García's "Inconciente colectivo", she has also sung music by other rock musicians such as Fito Paez's "Yo vengo a ofrecer mi Corazón."³⁸ The years preceding dictatorship were extremely violent, and in this context:

On the radios they listen[ed] to 75 percent national music, by decree. On par with the growth of rock there [was] a renewed presence of folklore, of protest songs, of an essentially testimonial art.³⁹

While the 1960s were not the first time that urban Argentines had been so well versed in

³⁵ Robert Pring Mill, 'Gracias a la vida': *The Power and Poetry of Song* (London: University of London, 1990), 14-15.

³⁶ Ibid., 119 – 122.

³⁷ She was also considered a threat by the military in Argentina. She was arrested while on stage during a concert in 1975 and forced into exile until 1979.

³⁸ See the appendix for a complete translation of the lyrics.

³⁹ Oscar Finkelstein, *León Gieco: Crónica de un sueño* (Buenos Aires: Editora AC, 1994), 43.

the music of the countryside, the 60s folklore boom expanded for the first time across borders of class and age. For many folk fans, the music also carried an anti-imperialist, leftist ideological weight.⁴⁰ Borrowing from the *Nueva Cancion* movement firmly situated *rock nacional* in a music-as-politics framework, thus posing a larger threat to the military system.

In addition to referencing local music, *rock nacional* borrowed a great deal from British and American musicians, thus provoking military distaste for international influence. Where León Gieco was compared with Bob Dylan, Charly García's band "Serú Girán" has often been remembered as "Los Beatles Argentinos." With such a plethora of musical muses, in terms of a political agenda, 1960s *rockeros* were as likely to rail against local concerns like the so-called soft dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía as they were to be heavily influenced by the hippie movement coming out of the United States. As Pipo (Alberto Lernoud, poet and early participant in the rock scene) says:

We started to realize that we were a group of people with a countercultural identity. It was the era of Onganía and one had to do things with a serious face and with all of the pretense of Argentine society. Besides, with Vietnam, there were the pacifist marches... I remember clearly a scene in plaza San Martín, along with a group of people: there we were with Rabey and Hernán Pujó teaching about pacifism and semi-intellectual things like McLuhan and Warhol.⁴¹

Thus while on the one hand the rock music that would endure and be christened *rock nacional* was so called because of its musical references to Argentine folk and tango and its political references to Generals Onganía and Videla, it nevertheless also arose very much in the context of a global movement of pacifism, inspired by the hippies in

⁴⁰ Sergio Pujol, *La década rebelde: Los años 60 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: emecé, 2002), 282.

⁴¹ From an interview with Pipo Lernoud, in Bitar, *Historia del Rock en Argentina*, 22.

attendance at Woodstock.⁴² Though this international borrowing does seem to be a contradiction, cosmopolitanism, as we have seen with *lunfardo*, has always been an important marker for Argentines (and for better or for worse, a way that they have distinguished themselves from the rest of Latin America). Rock music which was produced during the dictatorship by bands who would later be included under the umbrella term *rock nacional*, can serve as a monument to the period which later generations of music fans could turn to for a more complicated understanding of, to paraphrase a line from the electronic tango of the Gotan Project, *esas épocas que no eran buenas*.⁴³

Throughout its history, the term *rock nacional* has been subject of debate. In its early years it defined a sub-genre of non-commercial music which posited an inherent authenticity in its practitioners. In the 1980s, the use of *rock nacional* as a descriptor expanded in scope, to the point where, in 1993, Pablo Albarces could suggest it had lost its meaning altogether: all contemporary rock could or could not be considered *rock nacional*.⁴⁴ The ambiguity in the term was at the root of heated disputes in fanzines throughout the 1980s, but by the 1990s, music critics and fans had settled on a new term: *el próximo rock*. What this amounts to for the purpose of this study is that *rock nacional* is a historically bounded term, and, generally speaking, its use by present day writers is understood to be a reference to music of the dictatorship era.

From the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s, rock music in Argentina went from being a

⁴² Of course, the idea that all attendees at Woodstock were countercultural hippies is also a construction, as illustrated by Michael Frish in his chapter "Woodstock and Altamont," in *True Stories from the American Past* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 217-238.

⁴³ Eduardo Makaroff, Christophe H. Müller, and Philippe Cohen Solal, (collectively, The Gotan Project), "Época," *La Revancha del Tango*, Import, 2001.

⁴⁴ Albarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, 84.

subculture to the mass culture. This change took place over the course of two dictatorships and one democratic-in-name-only government. Though there were peaks and valleys in rock music's popularity throughout the period, it only became a mass culture after 1980. For the first decade, rock culture could be characterized as a style-defined subculture, described by cultural theorist Dick Hebdige as follows:

styles are produced within specific historical and cultural 'conjunctures;' they are not to be read as simply resisting hegemony or as magical resolutions to social tensions....[r]ather subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the images and material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them 'relative autonomy' within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work etc.⁴⁵

From the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, rock musicians and military leaders both drew from the same increasingly unstable and violent culture. Under the dictatorship, Charly García and General Videla, themselves, played central roles in that culture. Videla, threatened by an icon of the *joven sospechoso*, and García, threatened by the censors and strongmen employed by Videla, responded to each other, grafting their responses to other aspects of Argentine culture. Like in other parts of the world where rock culture was a growing phenomenon, in Argentina people who listened to rock music defined themselves not only by musical preferences but by dressing with a very distinct style, adopted from the hippies of the north.

As early as 1969, the mainstream press had begun to characterize rockeros as dangerous, unattached youth, as illustrated in this headline: "La policía detiene a 14 extraños de pelo largo que pretendían asistir a un peligroso festival de rock. [The police detain 14 strange ones with long hair who were trying to attend a dangerous rock music

⁴⁵ Dick Hebdige, "The Function of Subculture," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During (London: Routledge, 1999), 441.

festival.]”⁴⁶ As the 1970s marched on, the dangerous element of rock music went far beyond long hair and technicolor clothing.⁴⁷ In the early years, *rockeros* were usually lower class youth, but Charly García’s band Sui Generis (name taken from the latin term meaning ‘of its own kind, genus’) changed the demographic of the rock audience by incorporating middle class youth who had previously only been listening to rock from the UK or the USA. When, in 1974, Sui Generis held its famous goodbye concert, the biggest covered stadium in Argentina, Luna Park, was filled two nights in a row. This took even Charly García by surprise:

I thought we would fill one Luna [Park, the largest outdoor stadium], but I never thought we’d fill two. In reality, I didn’t have much notion of the people who followed Sui Generis...In my fantasy, Sui Generis was followed by a group of intellectuals who understood music and the rest were there just to dance, people who would be there regardless of whether it was Sui Generis or La Joven Guardia.⁴⁸

Sui Generis enlarged the audience, making rock, for the first time, a “fenómeno de masas [mass phenomenon].”⁴⁹ By the mid-1970s, though rock continued to be characterized as a lower class phenomenon (*rockeros* often over-emphasized or outright invented their humble origins and poverty-stricken lifestyles), sociologist Pablo Alabarces argues that the reverse was true—for the most part these rockers had middle and upper class origins.⁵⁰ Music fans followed rock musicians in adopting counter-cultural styles and values which identified *rockeros* as different from both their peers (the other groups,

⁴⁶ From the newspaper *Crónica*, 20 December 1969, quoted in Marcelo Bitar Fernández, *Historia del Rock en Argentina*, 41.

⁴⁷ *Rockeros* only made up one of many youth subcultures in Argentina at the time. *Chetas*, *playeras*, *bailadoras*, and *motocicleteadoras* were other groups who made up youth culture. Miguel Grinberg, ‘Carta Abierta a la juventud acosada,’ 15.

⁴⁸ Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, 71.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁰ Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, 47.

especially *los chetos* and *las caretas*, but also *los bohemios*, *caqueros* and *mersas*) and to distinguish themselves from the authorities. According to Eduardo Berti,

Los chetos represented the upper classes, or the middle classes with a desire for social assension; *los rockeros* [represented] the middle class and included subjects of the upper class who had a different kina of [social] conscience.⁵¹

The countercultural style served to indicate a countercultural value system, or at least this is what the authorities perceived.

Vila notes that between 1976 and 1977 there was a peak in rock concerts. The aforementioned Luna Park was filled at least twice a month as were numerous cafes and smaller theatres. Vila's colleague, Elizabeth Jelin adds: "El éxito del *rock nacional* se manifestó en la masiva asistencia a recitales (que llegaron a contar con 60,000 personas), en la proliferación de revistas dirigidas a la juventud [The success of *rock nacional* manifested itself in the mass attendance at concerts (which eventually counted up to 60,000) and the proliferation of magazines directed to youth]."⁵² Sergio Pujol described this period as having "concert fever."⁵³ However, the mood soon chilled in 1978 when very few musicians graced the stage. In official speeches the military regularly indicated their disapproval of rock music by associating it with other youthful evils such as drug abuse and terrorist activity.⁵⁴ At the Universidad del Salvador on 26 November 1977, in a now-famous speech Admiral Massera (a member of the military junta) said:

The young become indifferent to our world and begin to build a private universe...while they make a strong caste of themselves, they convert themselves

⁵¹ Berti, *Rockologia*, 31.

⁵² Elizabeth Jelin, *Los nuevos movimientos sociales /1 Mujeres. Rock nacional.*, comp. Elizabeth Jelin (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, S.A., 1985), 31, 85.

⁵³ Pujol, *Rock y dictadura*, 37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

into a secret society before everyone's eyes, celebrate their rituals: clothes, music.⁵⁵

Linking rock music to youth subversion was not only the army's effective rhetorical manoeuvre, but, as analysis of lyrics demonstrates, a well-grounded reading of rock music. While the military certainly did not censor every rock song, tear-gas every stage, nor threaten every musician, they certainly did their subtle best to limit the music's popularity when it seemed expedient to do so.

There was an enormous drop in recordings and performances in 1978. From 1965 until 1978, rock had climbed steadily in popularity, finding favor with not only youth but governing authorities such as municipal politicians. However, coeval with rock's increasing audience was an increasingly effective censorial apparatus which wreaked havoc on rock's more risky lyrics. This culminated in 1978 when the military employed its most aggressive tactics – auditoriums were tear-gassed and police regularly awaited concert-goers at auditorium exits:

The police van or the requisitioned buses made raids at the exits (or the entrances) of each concert, transforming the concert into an adventure in which no one knew where they would sleep that night.⁵⁶

In addition, 1977 had seen the import of *Saturday Night Fever*; disco dancing soon took hold of the musical scene. According to Vila: "[t]he discotheque replaced the concert. The dance replaced the song. English replaced Spanish."⁵⁷ Eduardo Berti, author of *Rockología: Documentos de los 80*, notes the way in which the military approved of disco:

⁵⁵ Paul Cammack and Pablo Vila, "Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina," *Popular Music* 6, no. 2 (May 1987), 133. (Translation by Paul Cammack).

⁵⁶ Alabarces, *Entre Gatos y Violadores*, 73.

⁵⁷ Cammack and Vila, "Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina," 136.

One cover of the magazine *Expreso Imaginario* [Imaginary Express] speaks today like a witness to those times. There, a furious *tomotazo* [crown of tomatoes, indicating his unpopularity with *Expreso Imaginario*] crowned a photo of the lead actor of the film *Saturday Night Fever*, John Travolta, icon of the disco movement that was seen favourably by the military government⁵⁸

Though the military were typically opposed to international music, this apparent about-face could be attributed to the vacuity of the music or perhaps that audiences engaged with the music by dancing, rather than by reflecting on a political situation. In this context, while García certainly suffered at the hands of censors, Gieco found it almost impossible to record anything at all. In recounting one of many threatening phone calls Gieco received during this period, Sergio Pujol says:

It wasn't the first time that he'd been trailed; he knew some national prisons from the inside—and of all the Argentine rockers, he was the most censored.⁵⁹

While Gieco may have been the most censored, many musicians were put in jail, if only to scare them into some sort of submission. Rather than remain in Argentina and submit to the tempers of local censors, many musicians went on tour. While some musicians felt the need to leave the country due to censorship, others felt that their rock-star status protected them from real military oppression. Charly García, for example, on remembering this period said:

Before, being a *rockero* was like being an aristocrat. An now its to be a *chabon*. I don't know, in the era of La Máquina de Hacer Pájaros [1976-1977] Videla was throwing shots over here, but we left in a convertible limosine and we were, I don't know, Eric Clapton.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Berti, *Rockologia*, 31.

⁵⁹ Pujol, *Rock y dictadura*, 82.

⁶⁰ Interview quoted on rock.com.ar. Charly García, interview by Roque Casciero, “‘Esto es rock argentino, no rock nacional’,” *Página/12*, 10 February 2002, *Espectáculos*, 4.

Though not all musicians had this sort of freedom, those in the super star level achieved the unbelievable: instead of being castigated by the military, some were courted.

Through rock concerts, *rock nacional* fans found not only lyrics that authentically expressed a reality of Argentine life, they also found community. The sociological studies of the rock music phenomenon have emphasized the importance of rock as community-forming not only through the concert experience but also through the sharing of music between friends and the underground presses which devoted large sections to discussion of this music. Pablo Vila conducted numerous interviews with individuals who became rock music fans during the dictatorship:

It was an era in which we spent a lot more *guita* [Lunfardo: money] on concerts than on discs.... But it was the period in which one began to listen to discs communally. For us, for example, in this period we would get together, between 10 and 15 guys... No one had albums in their house, everyone kept them in the house of one *flaco* (guy). In other words we had it all collected, you see?...It's that it was the only way to have anything as a collective then! (Carlos, employee, 30 years old).⁶¹

Buying rock music was considered subversive activity: oftentimes music stores would hide their collections, bringing them out only when asked specifically for an album. Also, after years of declining economy, the cost of music was prohibitive for many youth. Furthermore, despite the dangerous adventure concert attendance posed, rock fans recalled that:

To go to a concert was like a need. We didn't miss a single one. There was a tremendous need to be together. You felt sure that being together nothing was going to happen to you, but if you went out onto the street something would happen to you for sure....I think it was a state of collective energy, do you see? Which is what we were lacking. (Ricardo, 31, bank employee)⁶²

⁶¹ Vila, "Rock Nacional, Crónicas de la Resistencia Juvenil," 84-85.

⁶² Vila, "Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina," 133.

For youth, rock concerts provided an important cultural space where freedom could be experienced within the safety of community.

In addition to forming an audience through concerts, a virtual community was formed by the exchange of letters to underground magazines such as *Expreso Imaginario*. Claudio Kleinman notes the irony that *Expreso Imaginario*, “la revista contracultural por excelencia de esos años, irónicamente nació y murió con la dictadura, por lo que fue una revista del Proceso [the excellent countercultural magazine of those years that, ironically, was born and died in with the dictatorship, so it was a magazine of the *Proceso*.]”⁶³ Vila has undertaken extensive study of the letters section of this and other counter-cultural magazines, noting the community that was created.

it’s beautiful to find someone who thinks the same way you do. And it’s beautiful that through this magazine we can communicate with each other. (Mariana, July 1977)⁶⁴

Music fans used the magazine as a vehicle to express themselves and to exchange ideas and encouragement with other youth, often responding to each other in subsequent editions:

good for Sandra!...you can’t stand all the crap that surrounds you, and suddenly, you open a magazine and you find something as beautiful as Sandra’s letter.... [it’s] another life, more authentic, more natural, without lies, without poses. (Jorge, July 1977)⁶⁵

While the audience for rock music, in general, was growing over the course of the dictatorship, for many of these years *rock nacional* would cultivate a very specific audience, and one whose size was difficult to estimate given that fans rarely purchased

⁶³ Martín Pérez, “Esperando Nacer,” *Página 12* (13 November 2005).

⁶⁴ Vila, “Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina,” 135. (Translations by Vila).

⁶⁵ Idem.

the music, opting instead to attend concerts when they could, and listen to one copy among friends at someone's home.

By 1980, the military dictatorship was beginning to crumble, and rock musicians became increasingly daring. Rock music began to recover from 'Travoltamania' in 1979 following the re-unification of bands like Almendra and Manal; moreover, as bar and café owners felt the crunch of a newly faltering economy, they were no longer so keen to abide by the laws which said they should not rent their space to rock musicians. Remarking several years after the Malvinas War, sociologist Pablo Alabarces said:

The explosion of albums catalogued as *rock nacional*, rooted in the particular conditions which emerged with the war, is notable: from the thirty seven LP's of 1981 (which was a significant increase from the minimal eighteen released in 1979) it grew to seventy three in 1982, seventy seven in 1983 and eighty one in 1984.⁶⁶

The rapid distribution of rock music in Argentina began, signalled by the 1980 concert at La Rural, but it was the Malvinas War that really catalysed the spread of rock music throughout Argentina.⁶⁷

War with England had direct impact on rock music in two ways. First, the war was waged not only with battleships and arms but in the cultural milieu; the junta prohibited the broadcasting of rock music in English on all radio and TV stations in the country. The music of Charly García, León Gieco, and Los Gatos Salvajes suddenly hit the airwaves, garnering a *masividad* until then unknown for the rock music. Secondly, the authorities proposed a concert in support of soldiers at Las Malvinas, reflecting then *de facto* President Viola's new approach to youth culture. On 16 May 1982, the *Festival*

⁶⁷ Vila, "Rock Nacional, Crónicas de la Resistencia Juvenil," 86.

de Solidaridad Latinamericana took place in another of Argentina's huge stadiums: the Estadio Obras.⁶⁸ The military had envisioned a concert of youthful solidarity, but what they got was a fiercely anti-war three-day festival with an attendance of 40,000.⁶⁹ Charly García, León Gieco and other heroes of *rock nacional* offered a united pacifist front, and Gieco's "Sólo le pido a Dios" was remembered as the anthem of the festival. While a certain complicity can be noted in *rockeros* participation in this concert, here they definitively allied themselves with the mounting crowds of anti-military protesters. The mass audience that had been building bit by bit over the course of the dictatorship amassed in a great show of youthful solidarity, illustrating the power of the movement.

Rock Nacional's Luminaries: Juxtaposing León Gieco and Charly García

Drawing from his roots in rural Argentina and inspired by folksinger Bob Dylan, León Gieco is one of the most loved *rock nacional* musicians in the country. His biography opens with a prologue written by Mercedes Sosa, wherein she says:

While Charly was the number one.. the most loved was León... he is really connected with the people of the country, with their pain, their anguish, maybe because he took country *siestas* in his childhood....Like I have said many times, if there was no León Gieco, we would have had to create one, because he is a necessary artist.⁷⁰

Gieco grew up on a farm in the province of Sante Fe. Dirt roads marked out the grid of Cañada Rosquín, the closest small town where he attended school with "Amelia, la única maestra del único curso [Amelia, the only teacher at the only school.]" As his

⁶⁸ Bitar, *Historia del Rock en Argentina*, 102.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁰ Mercedes Sosa, "Prologo," in *León Gieco: Crónica de un sueño*, by Oscar Finkelstein (Buenos Aires: Editora AC, 1994), 3.

biographer, Oscar Finkelstein, says, León was:

Far away from the Italian neorealism like the pelvic movements of Elvis, the days passed as if the edge of the planet were the borders of one's own field.⁷¹

In contrast to Buenos Aires-born Charly García, León Gieco spent his formative years in the country side and only moved to Buenos Aires at aged 18 in 1969.

Just two years later, in 1971, he shared the stage with some of Argentina's most well known rock performers at one of the early, Woodstockesque, BA Rock festivals. His first album was released in 1973. In his first interview with rock magazine *Pelo*, an interviewer asked Gieco to describe the themes which inspired his music. He responded: "¿La temática? El campo, la mujer y las injusticias del hombre, aquí, allá y en todas partes [The theme? The country, women, the injustices of men, here, there, and everywhere.]"⁷² In 1973, Gieco's first album "León Gieco," stood out among a starburst of very accomplished music:

León is a brilliant star in the progressive Argentine sky. And even though they associate him with Bob Dylan, they also connect him with the acoustic trends with roots in both American and Argentine folklore. It's true that his music 'sounds' like the heroes of folk in the States, but his lyrics are charged with the testimonial weight of the era and he's never overlooked his *campesino* origin.⁷³

Gieco's smooth, Dylan-esque music testified to the trials of rural life and introduced the folk sounds of *chamamés* and *chacareras* into the rock scene, thus achieving a fusion not even seen during the folk boom of the 60s.⁷⁴ 1973 saw the election of Héctor Cámpora, the return of Perón, the massacre of his followers (whom he rejected and called *los estupidos*) at Ezieza, and the installation of Juan Domingo Perón as president. Despite

⁷¹ Finkelstein, *León Gieco: Crónica de un sueño*, 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷³ *Idem.*

⁷⁴ Quintana and de la Puente, *Todo Vale*, 89. See also: Pujol, *La década rebelde*, 286.

the return to democratic rule, 1973-1976 were years dominated by violence, censorship and “música...cargada de política y el aire deja escapar un cierto aroma a violencia [politically charged music and an air that had a certain violent aroma].”⁷⁵ Gieco continued to perform following the 1976 coup, but by 1978 he, like many other artists, went into exile. Recalling the patchwork that censors had made of *Fantasme de Canterville*, Gieco said composition had become impossible:

My ... style has always been to speak about something specific, something real, and I have to employ real words, I'm not terribly intellectual.⁷⁶

Gieco traveled to the US and to Europe and it was there, in the company of other Argentine exiles, that he first learnt about the macabre infrastructure that had been set up in his home country. He returned, armed with information about torture, concentration camps and mass graves and produced his fourth album, *IV LP* which was very critical of the military government.⁷⁷

This album was not censored as his earlier works had been, which is odd given its critical stance, but an oft-ignored element may have protected this work from censors: the album is replete with references to God. Songs like “Dice el inmigrante [Says the immigrant]” which decried the unfair burdens born by Argentina’s immigrant population posed no direct threat to the military machine; the plight of immigrants was certainly not a new issue, and military men might even have approved of Gieco’s Christ-like images of suffering:

*Lleva incertidumbre
Y la risa postergada
Lleva un libro, eso es bastante*

He brings uncertainty
The postponed laugh
He brings a book, this is enough

⁷⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁶ Gieco quoted by Finkelstein, *León Gieco*, 54.

⁷⁷ León Gieco, *IV LP*, Music-Hall, 1978.

<i>Dice el inmigrante</i>	Says the immigrant
<i>Lleva la cruz del marginado</i>	He brings the cross to the marginal
<i>Lleva otro idioma</i>	He brings another language
<i>Lleva su familia, eso es bastante</i>	He brings his family, this is enough
<i>Dice el inmigrante.</i>	Says the immigrant. ⁷⁸

Another song was perhaps too metaphorical for censors to worry too much about it. “Tema de los Mosquitos” opted for a fantastical landscape and an animal kingdom of rulers and ruled.⁷⁹ Here the military are a big spider, with mosquitos as willing sidekicks chewing butterflies in the bog. An out-of-character hyena sings a sad song. A bird of prey pecks at a lamb and an alligator cleans his teeth with the sparrow he has just eaten. This mad jungle has room for clear metaphorical lines to be drawn with the governing military and with the corrupted church. Butterflies, the icon of resurrection, are masticated; the lamb, symbolizing Jesus, is pecked at by a bird of prey; and the peacock, always a sign of pride, and perhaps here a symbol of Argentine *orgullo*, loses its signature features. What is significant about the jungle imagery here is that Gieco has changed the ideological space of battle from the urban landscape to the jungle—landscape characteristic of northern, rural Argentina.

In continuation with his earlier pacifism, the album also included the song “Sólo le pido a Dios,” which would become an anti-war anthem in Argentina during the Malvinas war of 1982. Its lyrics are explicit, but not accusatory:

<i>Sólo le pido a Dios</i>	All that I ask of God
<i>Que lo injusto no me sea indiferente</i>	Is that injustice not make me indifferent
<i>Que no me abofeteen la otra mejilla</i>	That they don't slap my other cheek
<i>Después de que una garra me arañó la suerte</i>	After a claw scratches my luck from me
 <i>Sólo le pido a Dios</i>	 All that I ask of God

⁷⁸ León Gieco, “Dice el inmigrante,” *IV LP, Music-Hall*, 1978.

⁷⁹ León Gieco, “Tema de los mosquitos,” *IV LP, Music-Hall*, 1978.

*Que la guerra no me sea indiferente
Es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte
Todo la pobre inocencia de la gente*

Is that the war not make me indifferent.
It's a great monster that tramples
All of the poor innocence of the people.⁸⁰

At the time, this song was certainly subversive; the military regimes in Argentina and Chile were at logger-heads about disputed territory in Tierra Del Fuego and outright war seemed imminent.⁸¹ *IV LP* therefore cut across much of the military regime's activities. Despite his own doubts about including "Sólo le pido a Dios" in this album, it has become synonymous with Gieco, as described by Finkelstein:

The public began to call for 'Sólo le pido a Dios' as a standard. Like a manifesto. Like an anthem/ hymn [*himno*]. And even when he chose to not sing it in his concerts, the public would sing it outloud at every close. And León sung with them.⁸²

Even in description of the song, the imagery of national song and religious hymn collide, adding a beatific weight to the song most associated with Gieco. While other songs on the album made little-or-no reference to religious iconography, no other song offered as blatant a critique of the bellicose government. On this album, Gieco was critical not only of the military junta, but of the Argentine people who were turning a blind eye to the state of the nation. Perhaps tired of hearing the rationalization (*debería estar por algo*) of why someone had suddenly disappeared, the song "La Historia Esta" offers a challenge to all Argentines:

*Dejate atravesar por la realidad
Y que ella grite en tu cabeza
Porque es muy malo dejar pasar
Por un costado a la historia esta*

Allow yourself to be dared by reality
And it that cries in your head
Because it's really bad to let pass
By one side, this history.⁸³

⁸⁰ León Gieco, "Sólo le pido a dios," *IV LP, Music-Hall*, 1978. (Translation by Pablo Vila, "Struggles against meaning" footnote 13, p. 26.

⁸¹ Pujol, *Rock y dictadura*, 112.

⁸² Finkelstein, *León Gieco*, 63.

⁸³ León Gieco, "La Historia Esta," *IV LP*, 1978.

This central verse invites all Argentines to participate in making their own history, and in reacting to reality. By employing images of the *pueblo*, Christian imagery and a call to the Argentine people to dare to acknowledge their own history, Gieco's songs slid by government censors, making this album one of his most famous. The poetic simplicity and earnest sincerity of Gieco as man and as musician has had no small impact on the important role he has played since the end of dictatorship in recalling the dictatorship and in continuing to fight for human rights in Argentina and elsewhere.

Charly García—intellectual, cosmopolitan, arrogant, dark, and avant-guard—offers an entirely different perspective on the role of rock musician in Argentina. While León Gieco may be the most loved Argentine rocker, Charly García is the most famous, or, as a fellow musician said in the 1980s, he is “el Maradona del rock.”⁸⁴ For a country of soccer fans, the comparison to *fútbol* player Diego Armando Maradona is akin to likening García to God. This status is due, in no small part, to the longevity and productivity of García's career.⁸⁵ Serú Girán, the band with which García is most commonly associated today, formed in 1978 and disbanded in 1982. Band biographer, Oscar Muñoz, writes that Serú Girán:

It was born in a repressive context that was progressively becoming more flexible. Up to leading to an ephemeral ‘boom’ with a tragic background and unforeseeable consequences which culminated in the opening of democracy. It is symptomatic that the band disintegrated just in that moment, which augured a promising future for the genre.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Andrés Calamaro, interviewed by unknown interviewee, “Charly es el Maradona del Rock,” on *Puerta 4*, (1997) video recording available on <http://www.yeah.com.ar/video/calamaro/calamaro01.wmv>; Accessed February 27, 2005.

⁸⁵ Beginning in 1972 with the album “Cristo Rock,” García has provided vocals and lyrics for three bands and, since 1982, has had an extremely successful solo career.⁸⁵ He is a prolific writer: his first band, Sui Generis, lasted only three years (1972-75) but three discs, including the severely censored *Pequeñas anécdotas sobre las Instituciones*, were recorded in that time. After leaving Sui Generis in 1975, García led La Máquina de Hacer Pajaros, producing two albums before disbanding in 1977.

⁸⁶ Oscar Muñoz, *Serú Girán: No llores por mí* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Distal SRL, 1992), 7.

Not only did Serú Girán form and disband under the dictatorship, but it was consistently one of the most popular bands:

One sees it reflected in the now traditional inquests of *Pelo* magazine. Serú Girán won the categories of best guitarist, best keyboardist, best bassist, best drummer, best composer (García) and best live group in 1978, 79, 80 and 81.⁸⁷

Above all, García's music is about ideas and freedom, and these (along with his ability to amass huge crowds of youth) are the elements that made him so threatening and so beguiling.

As Argentina transitioned to democracy, in 1983, Charly García began his solo career. As author of the vast majority of songs written for Sui Generis, Máquina de Hacer Pájaros, and Serú Girán, many of these songs have stayed within García's concert repertoire and continue to appear on albums – including commemorative “Best of” albums. Where León Gieco brought to rock images of the country, sounds of Chacarera, and the nerve to fight for human rights, Charly García has chameleoned from classical musician to protest song-writer to cocaine-addicted rock star to national idol. Less grounded than Gieco, García's music recalls the impact of the dictatorship on the city, the narrowing ideological space, the contrasts between fiction and reality, and disappearance.

Images and sounds of the city pervade Charly García's songs. Where Gieco imported *chacarera* from the country to the city, García brought tango from La Boca to Belgrano. García's borrowing from and referencing tango can be seen throughout his career, from songs like “Los Jóvenes de Ayer [The youth of yesterday]” which talks about tango culture to a later album entitled *Tango 4*, and this is one important way in

⁸⁷ <http://www.rock.com.ar/bios/0/260.shtml> Accessed: February 20, 2006.

which García has incorporated national themes and sounds of Buenos Aires in his music.⁸⁸ Oftentimes, however, in music written while García was with Serú Girán, the city and the people that populate it are faceless and un-named. In removing identifiable markers (street names, recognizable places, or even descriptive adjectives) García managed to construct, on multiple levels, a city rendered lifeless. In “Los sobrevivientes [The Survivors],” García says:

<i>Estamos ciegos de ver</i>	We are blind to see
<i>Cansados de tando andar</i>	Tired of moving so much
<i>Estamos hartos de huir</i>	We are fleeing
<i>En la ciudad</i>	In the city
<i>Nunca tendremos raíz</i>	We will never have roots
<i>Nunca tendremos hogar</i>	We will never have a home
<i>Y sin embargo, ya vés</i>	And however, you see
<i>Somos de acá.</i>	We are from here. ⁸⁹

Blind, the ‘we’, in which García includes himself as narrator, are perpetually fleeing, roaming a city in which they will never have a root or a home. In the way that “*vos no existís* [you don’t exist]” denied victims of the dictatorship their ‘being’, ‘Los Sobrevivientes’ are survivors without their own niche.⁹⁰ As *rock nacional* both captured and rejected the nation-building project of the military junta, García’s speakers are so often conflicted citizens of the country: they are from here, but they will never be at home. “Paranoia y soledad” asks:

<i>Y qué es lo que hay que hacer</i>	And what does one have to do
<i>Para evitar enloquecer?</i>	To avoid going crazy?
<i>No pensar que se es</i>	Stop thinking about what is

⁸⁸ See Charly García with Serú Girán, “Los Jóvenes de Ayer,” *Bicicleta*, 1980, and Charly García, *Tango 4*, 1991.

⁸⁹ Charly García with Serú Girán, “Los Sobrevivientes,” *La Grasa de las capitales*, 1979.

⁹⁰ “Vos no existís [You don’t exist],” was one of the military’s catch phrases, a linguistic prelude to the disappearance of victims. In *Lexicon of Terror*, Margarite Feitlowitz argues that this phrase can now be found on playgrounds and is thus yet another part of the dictatorship legacy.

*O que se ha sido
Y no volverlo a pensar jamas.*

Or what has been
And never return to think again.⁹¹

Unlike Gieco, who challenged Argentines to think more, García speaks to the need to leave thought behind in the same way that *Los sobrevivientes* are at once patriotic “somos de aca” and homeless. The loneliness of paranoia and the exhaustion of constant fleeing come together in *rock nacional*’s first song about suicide. “Viernes 3 AM,” captures the ambivalence of life in a grey city and provides a marked contrast to earlier, more encouraging, songs such as ‘No te dejes desanimar [Don’t allow yourself to loose faith].’

In addition to painting a picture of a lifeless city, many of García’s lyrics sketch a dystopic image of Argentina’s central institutions and a narrowing ideological space. The 1974 album, *Pequeñas anécdotas sobre las instituciones [Little anecdotes about institutions]*, reveals a preoccupation with the structuring of Argentine society. *Pequeñas anécdotas* initially dedicated one song to each of Argentina’s major institutions: The Catholic church, the family, the judicial system, the police, the army, and so on, but two songs “Botas Locas [Crazy Boots]” and “Juan Represión,” about the army were censored. While censorship came to have a severe impact on rock musicians during the dictatorship, a song written by Charly García a full two years before the coup illustrates the long-standing fight song-writers had had with figures like *Señor Tijeras* [Mr. Scissors]. *Señor Tijeras* personifies Argentine censorial boards such as COMFER.⁹² *Tijeras* is a bland fellow whose bland job is given a bit of spice when he gets to go to the little movie houses to determine which flagrant women should be cut from the big screen. García portrays him as the most disturbing of moral curators; his fascination with

⁹¹ Charly García with Serú Girán, “Paranoia y soledad,” *La Grasa a las Capitaes*, 1979,

⁹² The *Comité Federal de Radiodifusión* was founded in 1972 and still exists today.

transgression borders on sin itself. *Señor Tijeras* passes his days in the presence of women whom he alternatively imagines naked (his secretary), loves in a perfunctory/bureaucratic manner (his wife), or cuts to pieces and leaves metaphorically bleeding and mutilated on screen (the movie or porn star). His job, says García, not without a touch of irony, is ‘*de cuidar la moral* [to care for morality]’, wherein ‘La Moral’ could really be considered the other woman with whom he passes his days. In targeting censors, García produced a song that spoke to the real experience of icons in Argentine culture and thus staked his claim in authenticity in two ways: first, by outing the role of Scissors-men and second, by doing it in song. According to Darío Quintana and Eduardo de la Puente, authors of *Todo Vale: Antología Analizada de la Poesía Rock Argentina desde 1965*, the period 1972-1976 saw an increase in socially critical rock with much of this criticism being directed at institutions.⁹³

In addition to speaking of the city and expressing concern over a narrowing ideological space, García also offered a more subtle form of rebellion. By referencing European thinkers such as Oscar Wilde (*The Canterville Ghost* surely inspired the song García authored: “Fantasme de Canterville”), Lewis Carroll (“Canción de Alicia en el país”) and pop-opera Andrew Lloyd Webber’s ‘Don’t Cry for me Argentina,’ (“No llores por mi, Argentina”), García threatened the *Argentinidad* the military were so consciously constructing.⁹⁴ The reference to Oscar Wilde is of particular interest because García’s detractors often accused him of having the voice of a homosexual—perhaps “Fantasme

⁹³ Quintana and de la Puente, *Todo Vale*.

⁹⁴ The phrase ‘*No llores por mi Argentina*’ was apparently uttered by Eva Perón just before her death. They were immortalized on the international scene in the most popular song (Don’t cry for me, Argentina) from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s 1978 musical *Evita*, which had some fame in Argentina. Serú Girán’s 1982 album of that title thus referenced both *Evita*’s death and her reincarnation in the musical.

de Canterville” was his nuanced response to such low-minded insults. García pushed this later in his career by adopting very feminized (a kind of 1940s dandy) image. Homosexuality would have been a direct threat to the masculinity of the military.⁹⁵ However, this should not be taken too far: nothing in the rock of this early period broaches the topic of homosexuality with any clarity. In any case, though *rockeros* were all men, in the military’s gendered construction, they would have been failed symbols of masculinity. Because they had long hair, because they were not successful father figures, because they were pacifists and yes, because they still sung a lovely falsetto, *rockeros* were too effeminate for the military regime.⁹⁶ However, within the rock scene, success still came only to socially mobile men; it was not until a band called *Las Brujas* [The Witches/ The Girlfriends] that an all female band was created.⁹⁷ Thus the masculinity that was promoted by the military was mirrored in *rock nacional*.

Between 1976-1980, the height of the dictatorship, Quintana and de la Puente argue that only two musicians explicitly sang about dictatorship. León Gieco’s song, “Los Chacareros de Dragones,” metaphorically recounts the death of Chilean folksinger Víctor Jara, while Charly García’s “Canción de Alicia en el País,” describes the situation in Argentina.⁹⁸ Its rather benign title meant that this song slid under the radar of censors and thus made it to the stage. Alicia translates into Alice in English, and there are clear parallels to be drawn between Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the*

⁹⁵ See Jelin, *Labors of Memory*, 76.

⁹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the role of gender and spectacle in Argentina’s dictatorship, please see: Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁹⁷ In contrast, folk music of the 60s was sufficiently open to female performers that a compilation album entitled *Mujeres Argentinas*; it was one of the most popular folk albums of the 60s, due, in no small part, to the popularity of Mercedes Sosa. Please see: Pujol, *La Década Rebelde*, 287.

⁹⁸ Charly García, “Canción de Alicia en el País,” *Bicicleta*, 1980. See the appendix for a complete translation of the lyrics.

Looking Glass and Alicia's misadventures in the country. In addition to referencing European literature, García says that, "*los brujos interpretan el papel de 'López Rega...La morsa es Onganía y la tortuga es Illía* [the warlocks play the role of 'López Rega... the walrus is Onganía and the turtle is Illía]."⁹⁹ "Canción de Alicia en el País" illustrates García's sophisticated approach to Argentina as a nation under dictatorship and his ongoing preoccupation (illustrated elsewhere in songs like "Cinema Verité" and "Que se pueda hacer, salvo ver películas" [What can one do, except watch films]) with the blurring of truth and fiction.

*Y es que aquí, sabes
el trabalenguas trabalenguas
El asesino te asesina
y es mucho para ti.
Se acabó ese juego que te hacía feliz.*

And it's that here, you know
The tongue twisters, tongue twisters
The assassin murders you
And it is a lot for you
This game that used to make you happy is
over.¹⁰⁰

The *trabalenguas* could easily refer to the twists and turns of discourse the military used in any of their official speeches. As we have seen, the military junta was known for its eloquent addresses and their well-crafted euphemisms.¹⁰¹ The game to which García refers is less clear: it could be Alicia's game at subversion, thus linking her with youth who really were armed. Or, perhaps the game is a word game of tongue twisters that have lost their playful charms by becoming a weapon in the military's arsenal.

Early in the song, it is difficult to say who has moral authority but the second stanza is much more clear. Alicia is instructed: "*No cuentes lo que viste en los jardines,*

⁹⁹ Quintana and de la Puente, *Todo Vale*, 104. José López Rega was Argentina's Minister of Social Welfare and the founder of the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, "'Triple A.'"

¹⁰⁰ Charly García with Serú Girán, "Canción de Alicia en el País," *Bicicleta*, Sazam Records, 1980.

¹⁰¹ Euphemistic language is, in fact, often characteristic of totalitarian regimes. The most famous examples comes from the *Shoah*: Todorov argues that euphemism is the third way in which authoritarian regimes try to control memory, the first two being: wiping out the evidence of crimes against humanity and intimidation. All three of these were employed by the military in Argentina. Please see *Hope and Memory* 113-115.

el sueño acabó [Don't tell what you saw in the gardens, the dream is over]."¹⁰² Like in *Alice in Wonderland*, Alicia has found herself in a land that does not make sense. Fantastic characters such as the King of Spades, witches, walruses and turtles suggest that this is not reality, but an early line has already told us that the dream has ended. Alicia has found herself in a dark – but very real – side of the country. The river is full of the dead, the lawyers and witnesses are all gone and they (those who are responsible) play cricket under the moon. This song would not have attracted the attention of censors because the melody is light and airy, beguiling the sinister theme veiled in metaphor and allusion.

At the twilight of dictatorship, in 1983, Charly García released a song entitled “Los Dinosaurios,” which was his most blatant critique of the military government.¹⁰³ Like other rock songs that followed the demise of dictatorship, García blatantly characterized who could (if they hadn't already) disappear: friends in the neighbourhood, singers on the radio, people in the newspapers, the person you love. Despite this, by 1983 most social commentators were confident that dictatorship was waning. García's lyrics capture this assertion:

Los amigos del barrio pueden desaparecer, Friends in the neighbourhood can disappear
*pero los dinosaurios van a desaparecer.*¹⁰⁴ But the dinosaurs will disappear

Here, the military are characterized as dinosaurs, and like those that they have ‘disappeared’, they too will disappear.

¹⁰² Charly García, “Canción de Alicia,” *Bicicleta*, 1980.

¹⁰³ Charly García, “Los Dinosaurios,” *Clics Modernos*, Interdisc, 1983. See the appendix for a complete translation of the lyrics.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

In addition to the complexity of a national music that resisted the governing powers and the subtle rejection of masculinity engendered by the military, *rock nacional* also juggled with competing images of Catholicism. While the church was included in targeted institutions, religious symbols remained sacrosanct for *rockeros*. Quintana and de la Puente say:

Religion was a theme of permanent preoccupation in rock... Criticism still addressed this feature, but it is important to emphasize that as much as the Bible (before) and the figure of Jesus in this case are well treated, the institution itself was thrown rocks.¹⁰⁵

Charly García's "Eiti Leda" ends with a reference to a blue cape, which could be read in several ways. The speaker says:

<i>No ves mi capa azul</i>	You don't see my blue cape
<i>Mi pelo hasta los hombros</i>	My hair down to my shoulders ¹⁰⁶

A first reading could simply situate the speaker within the psychedelic rocker movement: he is wearing bright clothing, including a blue cape, and sports the ragged symbol of rebellion: long hair. However, read intertextually with other songs by García, this blue cape could also be a reference to the Virgin Mary. In "Los Sobrevivientes" the speaker says:

<i>Yo siempre te he llevado</i>	I have always carried you
<i>Bajo mi bufanda azul</i>	Under my blue scarf
<i>Por las calles como Cristo a la cruz.</i>	Through the streets like Christ on the cross. ¹⁰⁷

The ongoing respect given to religious iconography, juxtaposed with a rejection of the Catholic church as an institution, illustrates the undiminished importance of these figures

¹⁰⁵ Quintana and de la Puente, *Todo Vale*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Charly García, "Eiti Leda," *Serú Girán*, Serú Girán, Orpheon, 1978.

¹⁰⁷ Charly García, "Los Sobrevivientes," *La Grasa de las Capitales*, Serú Girán, Orpheon, 1979.

and images to the youth of Argentina while also hinting at something which would come out later in study of the role of the Catholic church during dictatorship, namely, its complicity. Elizabeth Jelin says:

Until 1979, the government practically counted on the silence of the political parties, the unions and the leadership of the church.¹⁰⁸

Mark Osiel notes that the military used Christian theology as an important justification for their Dirty War:

Far-right theologians were especially influential in two respects....Navy officers returning from dropping victims into the sea received comfort from chaplains who would cite parables from the Bible about separating the wheat from the chaff.¹⁰⁹

Rock musicians continued to rely on Christian iconography to express the burdens and betrayals of life under dictatorship, thus employing the same iconography which provided justification for the most deliberately castigating military regime Argentina had ever seen.

Perhaps it was because *rockeros* and the military junta drew from the same well of Christian iconography that the military were able to justify their attempts to co-opt rock music despite its apparent anti-military stance. An incident in 1976 reveals what seems to have been a pattern when the military attempted to use rock to its own ends. Upon noticing that troops in Tucumán were suffering from a lack of morale, the military hired a radical Chilean rock band, “Los Javias,” to play for the troops. It would seem that the popularity of “Los Javias” trumped their politics in a way that would have been paralleled had the US military chosen “The Velvet Underground” to sing for the embattled troops in Korea instead of Marilyn Monroe. Apparently, however, “Los

¹⁰⁸ Jelin, *Los movimientos sociales ante la crisis*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ Osiel, in *Representations*, 130.

Javias” refused to play a part in enlivening the troops and as a result were forced into exile from the Southern Cone.¹¹⁰ Just as Southern Cone dictatorships in the 1970s worked together to punish each other’s subversives—the so-called *Operación Condor*—they also disciplined each other’s artists. While *rockeros* and the junta certainly employed similar imagery, it is refusals such as these that justifies an ongoing reading of rock under dictatorship as a form of resistance. Be it playful suggestions that the military construct immense space observatories or a defiant adherence to lyrics as originally written, *rockeros*, for the most part, demonstrated their refusal to benefit from or cooperate with the military apparatus.

As the dictatorship came to a close with the election of President Raúl Alfonsín in 1983, *rock nacional* crowded the top of every chart in the country. The *Festival de Solidaridad Latinoamerica* heralded the mass popularity of *rock nacional* and firmly connected it to an anti-military stance. This chapter has illustrated the undeniable relationship rock music in Argentina has had with not only the dictatorship of 1976 – 1983 but with previous authoritarian regimes. By examining the definition of the sub-genre *rock nacional*, we have seen the way in which music critics claimed this rock as the authentic voice of a generation of youth who were targeted, censored, and too often, disappeared by the military. These claims on authenticity have provided a foundational myth for *rock nacional* that persists to this day. An examination of the lyrics of two of *rock nacional*’s heroes—Charly García and León Gieco—has revealed themes of torture, disappearance, censorship and the abandoned city.

¹¹⁰ Berti, *Rockologia*, 81.

In addition, these lyrics reveal a central aspect of Hebdige's point that subgenres, rather than inventing their own traditions out of thin air, "cobble together...styles out of the images and material culture available to them." Thus iconography and figures from the Christian tradition fed the cultural apparatus created by both the military and rock musicians. Furthermore, as rock culture became an increasingly powerful force in Argentine society, the military made many gestures towards the culture even attempting to co-opt the movement. This chapter has also illustrated the personal experiences both García and Gieco had with figures like *Señor Tijeras* and *Juan Represión*. Following dictatorship, songs like these would continue to have an important currency in history lessons of Argentina's past, demonstrating the monumental role music can play in society. By looking to post-dictatorship discourse about rock music in fanzines, "Best of" Collections, academic scholarship, government discourse and specialized journalism, the next chapter will illustrate the ongoing importance this music has had for remembrance of the Dirty War following 1983.

Chapter Three

Democracy and the Era of Commemoration

In the years immediately following the demise of dictatorship, Argentines had no need to *try* to remember this recent period—the media were literally filled with reports of trials, commissions, and images of the era. However, by the early 1990s, social commentators such as journalists and teachers had started to speak about a reigning apathy about the last military dictatorship. Above all, this concern was expressed in relation to youth. This chapter compares the way scholars, politicians, journalists and artists have used *rock nacional* in the period between 1995 and 2006, when Argentine social commentators, sparked by the confessions of several military men, plunged into a collective debate over memories of the dictatorship. Memory and commemoration have become central themes in the past decade. Though *rock nacional* is only one of many media to commemorate dictatorship (film, TV, fine art, literature, and tango are other crucial forms), it is one that is at once omnipresent in the current social/political/cultural scene and banefully understudied.

Where other media undoubtedly spark much critical thinking on how Argentines remember the dictatorship, rock music boasts several distinguishing characteristics. Music is portable—it can be experienced in both communal spaces and in private. Music appreciation has an almost liturgical aspect to it: like a regularly spoken prayer or mantra, music fans will repetitively listen to the same songs, and will be particularly attuned to the minute changes which might occur between one edition and another. The icons of *rock nacional* have aged and, be it by dint of maturity or enduring political commitment,

icons like Charly García and León Gieco have stopped rebelling against major Argentine institutions and have started to sing alongside *Las Madres* and Argentine presidents in an effort to break the trend of youthful apathy towards dictatorship. This chapter will continue to chart the role of Charly García and León Gieco, noting the divergent paths each took beginning in 1983. García embraced the rock music industry, and had embittered fans accuse him of “selling out,” Gieco abandoned the industry altogether and embarked on a three-year odyssey through the backwoods of Argentina during which he earned unbounded respect from anyone ever interested in defying the system.

Music journalists and fans often assign juxtaposing positions to Gieco and García. Gieco has never wavered from his commitment to human rights. García, between fits of drug addiction and *demasiado ego* [too much ego], has also entertained human rights issues but without the necessary sincerity. While politicians have always courted both musicians, as memory of dictatorship has become newly central in Argentine discourse, it is Gieco, more than García, who has been linked to this cause. I will show how, starting in 1989, both were re-incorporated into a human rights-centred democratic discourse which saw them introduced into entirely new public spaces—spaces coded for politics such as the Casa Rosada and spaces coded for commemoration such as the proposed museum at the ESMA (*Escuela Mecánica de la Armada*) in downtown Buenos Aires. The underground culture of resistance that *rock nacional* so embodied, was newly welcomed by the official state, changing its position on a political level and ‘officializing’ what was previously a grass-roots, anti-establishment movement. This incorporation highlights a symbiotic relationship that developed between human rights organizations such as *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, the government and Argentine

artists and musicians willing to commemorate victims of state terror to the exclusion of other groups or individuals who suffered under the dictatorship. Gieco has become a commemorative jewel for the present government, but as his compositions have begun to reference worldwide injustices, he has also provided a much-needed context into which memory of dictatorship can be placed.

President Raúl Alfonsín was elected in October 1983, took office on December 10 of that year and within days had set up CONADEP (*Comisión Nacional sobre la desaparición de personas*, National Commission on the Disappeared). Shortly thereafter, he annulled the law enacted by Bignone—which had promised immunity to members of the military who might be accused of human rights abuses—and promised that trials of the military juntas would be forthcoming. With his background in the fight for human rights, the future for justice and reparation looked bright. In the initial post-dictatorship period, mass graves were exhumed, concentration camps were discovered (sometimes next door), and the mass media dived into the melée, running day-time features about tales of torture and survival. In popular parlance, it was called the horror show.¹ To hear many historians talk of it, it was as if a collective lashing-out occurred: the justice system flexed its atrophied muscles, the media flashed images not only of gore and crime but of nudity and sexual immorality, and the government stood tall, upright, and stable for the first time in recent history. Within this mess of salacious confessing and cathartic crying out, those artistic media which had not been altogether oppressed lost their panache (and their need) for poetic evasions and metaphoric truth telling. Rock music, just after its golden days of 1981-1983, lost its way in the early days of democracy.

¹ Suarez-Orozco, “Speaking the Unspeakable,” 370.

The so-called horror show did not last long. The trial of the nine ex-military commanders which began in April 1985 and ended eight months later—with four of them acquitted and five of them sentenced to imprisonment for between four years and life—sobered the discussion, and suggested that perhaps the Argentine judicial system could handle this reparative task.² The trials were a defining point in Argentine history, a *lieu de mémoire* which has had lasting significance for many Argentines.³ However, by the end of 1986, after a year of military unrest and with a jittery democracy, Congress passed the controversial *Ley de Punto Final* [Final Point Law] which placed a time limit on the prosecution (and bringing to prosecution) of members of the armed forces.⁴ The following Easter, April 1987, saw a full-fledged military uprising and resulted in the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* [The Due Obedience Law] of May 1987 which banned prosecution of members of the armed forces if they could show they had been following orders.⁵ The following two years saw even more military unrest and shortly after Carlos Menem was elected in May 1989, he enacted two presidential pardons, first of lower level military and leaders and the armed guerrilla movement and later of “the convicted and imprisoned members of the military juntas.”⁶ In total, 277 individuals were released from prison; while the pardons included ex-guerrillas, the majority were military officers.⁷ The courts and the chambers had failed.

² Jelin et al, *Labors of Memory*, 122.

³ See, for example, Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado Y Presente - Guerra, Dictadura y Sociedad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2002), 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵ *Idem.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷ Federico G. Lorenz, “Memorias de aquel veinticuatro: Las conmemoraciones del golpe militar de 1976,” *Todo es Historia*, no. 404 (March, 2001), 19.

Despite the impassioned street protesting that erupted in the immediate wake of the pardons, for the most part, the failure of the institutional apparatus met a society that was tired of the struggle and ill-equipped to mount a new approach to un-punished perpetrators and unburied victims. In the early 1990s, however, an ex-Navy officer named Adolfo Scilingo had a chance meeting with journalist Horatio Verbitsky. For a year after this meeting, Verbitsky interviewed Scilingo who was plagued by the guilt of his participation in the death flights which saw thousands of live—though sedated—victims thrown out of military planes over the River Plate.⁸ The culmination of these interviews came when Scilingo appeared on Channel 9 on the news program *Hora Clave* or “Critical Hour.”⁹ Pressed by the interviewer, he admitted his guilt in a public venue, encapsulating the contradictions and evils of the *Proceso*. Following this interview, a whole series of people were interviewed, something commentators called “the Scilingo effect.” This resulted in several other shamed army-officers stepping forward to confess their own participation in anti-subversive activities, culminating in the apology put forth by then army Chief of Staff, General Martín Balza on April 25, 1995.¹⁰

Coeval with this about face on the part of the military was the formation of HIJOS (*Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencia*, Children for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence), the start of the Truth Trials and the indictment of Jorge Rafael Videla on the charge of kidnapping babies—a charge which had not been imagined when the immunity bills were conceived. This flurry of activity sparked a

⁸ These interviews became the bases of a best-selling book: Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1995).

⁹ Please see Feitlowitz, “‘The Scilingo Effect’: The Past is a Predator,” in *A Lexicon of Terror*, 193 – 255.

¹⁰ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 223- 224.

reconsideration of the dictatorial past and how it ought to be remembered as the century came to an end.

While the “Scilingo effect” partly explains why Argentine society re-explored the dictatorial past with such fervour in the mid-1990s, other factors contributed to a favourable commemorative climate. In academic circles, memory had become a major area of scholarship. In 1992, Pierre Nora’s concluding chapter to his three-volume *Les Lieux de Mémoire* noted that an obsession with commemoration had come to dominate “all contemporary societies that see themselves as historical.”¹¹ Argentina has been no exception to this trend: numerous scholars have noted a rise in the importance of national memory and commemoration in the past decade.¹² The HIJOS made specific claims on memory as a *raison d’être* for their union, saying: “For biological reasons we are those that will continue memory. This is why we are together.”¹³ Additionally, there were factors of timing: 1996 marked the twentieth anniversary for the military coup of 24 March, and this fortuitously coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the first *rock nacional* single to be released in the country. The link of rock music to commemoration of dictatorship was furthered by a new medium for music: with the advent of the Compact Disc, recording companies had the perfect excuse for a series of re-releases which also celebrated the thirtieth anniversary. The explicit link between *rock nacional*

¹¹ Pierre Nora, “The Era of Commemoration,” 609.

¹² Exemplary studies of memory in Argentina include: Elizabeth Jelin, “The Politics of Memory: The Human Rights Movements and the Construction of Democracy in Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1994), Elizabeth Jelin, *Labors of Memory*, Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror*, Ignacio A. Gutierrez Zaldivar and Sergio J. Guelerman, *Memorias en Presente: Identidad y Transmisión en la Argentina Posgenocidio* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2001), Bergero and Reati, comps., “Rockeros y grafiteros,” Inés Izquierre, “Recapturing the Memory of Politics,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 31, no. 6 (May-June 1998), Jaroslavsky, *The Future of Memory*.

¹³ Quoted originally in *Ni el flaco perdón de Dios. Hijos de desaparecidos* (Gelmen, J. y La Madrid, M. 1997) and reproduced in Elvira Martorell’s “Recuerdos del presente: memoria y identidad: Una reflexión en torno a HIJOS,” eds. Gutierrez Zaldivar and Guelerman, *Memorias en Presente*, 135.

and memory of dictatorship had its roots not only in the content of the 1970s songs, but in a few key moments in the 1980s.

In contrast to the trend of commemoration of the 1990s, for the most part, issues of dictatorship fell off the radar in the early 1980s. Musicians and music specialists—less concerned about the future of democracy—were reveling in their freedom to express themselves. Suddenly the thematic range was wide open: with such an aperture to explore and no moral urgency about any particular topic, much rock music in the early 1980s dove at once into a multitude of themes—sexuality, Latin American identity, feminism—and also felt free to explore more carefree aspects of democratic life. With regards to dictatorship, this amounted to a luke-warm commitment to human rights issues that saw most musicians only peripherally involved in calls for justice. Charly García, himself, captured much of the *onda* [mood] of this period in his song “Transas,” as pointed out by Vila:

He was bored with making protest songs and sold himself to Fiorucci
He was bored with laying wagers and started studying
...Someday he'll return to the sources, I don't think that he can stop protesting
He is occupied, he lost some fame, but things are not too bad.¹⁴

As Vila has explained elsewhere, the verb *transar* means to sell-out, and here, on one of his first solo albums, García suggests that boredom, not money, had led him to sell-out. Despite pernicious boredom, García and others did, at a few points in the 1980s, participate in human rights events.

An example taken from the most popular rock magazine, *Pelo* (in circulation from 1970 to 1993), illustrates the equivocal commitment rock music and its journalistic

¹⁴ Charly García, “Transas,” on *Clics Modernos*, 1983, translated by Pablo Vila, in “Argentina’s “Rock Nacional,””, 8.

apparatus had towards issues of justice and memory. While scholars such as Marcelo Suarez Orozco have defined the early 1980s as a “horror show” where “neighbours suddenly dared to swap stories of terror that they would never have dared to tell before,” *Pelo* reveals an overall flippant attitude to such themes. In 1986 an edition published a ‘*primicia total*’ or a “total scoop” wherein it listed its own black list calling it:

A unique and different compilation of musicians, artists, politicians, personalities in general and illustrious unknowns that could never gain admittance to the immaculate pages of the leading magazine of underdeveloped rock.¹⁵

The editors, having so immensely enjoyed the experience of creating their black list (which included figures such as Julio Iglesias, Margaret Thatcher [sic], Ronald Reagan, Diego Maradona, Victor Heredia), invited Argentine youth to do the same. The names on this list reveal anti-British and anti-US sentiment in the figures of Reagan and Thatcher, as well as a rejection of local heroes such as soccer player Maradona and folksinger Heredia. Employing the official names of Argentine censorship bodies, the invitation said:

We invite you to join the glorious inquisition: write and shape your own black list. Send us the names of those persons, relatives, goalies, soccer players, professors, amigos and all detestable beings that you want to see printed in the black lists... And don't let yourself be deceived by imitations, this is the only authorized black list that complies with all the norms of IRAM, COMFER and CONICET. Once more we are at the vanguard of third world journalism, offering a unique service in Argentina....Black lists, the unique pleasure of censoring.¹⁶

Instead of responding with reverence to the surrounding discourse about injustice and state-sponsored terror, the editors of *Pelo* had no qualms about taking a tongue-in-cheek approach to the issues of censorship.

¹⁵ Regarding the “Horror Show,” please see: Suarez-Orozco, “Speaking the Unspeakable,” 370. Osvaldo Daniel Ripoll, Ed. “Las Listas Negras,” *Pelo*, 279, November, 1986. No page numbers.

¹⁶ “Las Listas Negras,” *Pelo*, 279, November, 1986. No page numbers.

In a process similar to the way in which tango achieved international stardom before being lauded at home, the narrative which linked rock musicians to human rights causes was told internationally first. In 1987, for example, León Gieco undertook a tour in Germany which concluded with his performance at a Festival for Political Song in Berlin.¹⁷ Since 1982, when singer-activist Mercedes Sosa had returned to Argentina from exile abroad, she had been singing alongside certain rock musicians, incorporating their original songs into her repertoire and then taking them abroad with her as her international status propelled her to sing in places like Carnegie Hall.¹⁸ For a brief moment in the 1980s, this international focus on local music also landed in Argentina. Commemorating the 1948 signing of the Universal declaration of Human Rights, in 1988 Amnesty International launched a world-wide tour of rock musicians promoting human rights. Entitled “Human Rights Now,” or “Derechos Humanos, Ya!” it closed on 15 October 1988 in the River Plate Stadium in Buenos Aires. León Gieco, Charly García, and others sang alongside international stars like Sting, Bruce Springsteen and Peter Gabriel. In front of 70,000 spectators, Gieco sang “Hombres de hierro” and “Sólo le pido a Dios,” with audience members reportedly singing along.¹⁹ García sang “Demoliendo Hoteles,” “Nos Siguen Pegando Abajo,” “Los dinosaurios,” and “La Ruta del Tentempié.”

However, the story García tells about participation in this landmark tour presages his later album and performances, with *demasiado ego* (too much ego). Instead of supporting the integrity of the cause, García lamented that he had not been allowed onto

¹⁷ <http://www.rock.com.ar/bios/0/117.shtml>

¹⁸ Stephen Holden, “Pop: Mercedes Sosa Sings,” *New York Times*, 18 October, 1987, p. 80.

¹⁹ [rock.com.ar](http://www.rock.com.ar) See the appendix for a full translation of the lyrics.

the stage for “more than one second!”²⁰ In what amounted to a childish tirade, he said: “it put me in such a bad mood when [Bruce] Springsteen’s North American roadies looked at me like ‘Who are you?’ I am the boss...and I said this to Springsteen’s face, which he didn’t like.”²¹ Though he admitted his set might have sounded bad, he prided himself on the fact that he had not stooped to playing his music like ‘they’ wanted, with an acoustic guitar. In contrast with the role he would play from the mid-1990s onwards, García was not about to pretend to hold any sort of allegiance to human rights causes, especially if it compromised *his* image and *his* music. Thus, throughout the 1980s, we find only a tentative commitment to human rights and commemoration. This period provides a foil against which the consistent involvement of certain musicians in the 1990s can be put into relief.

Paralleling the trends in rock music, historian Federico G. Lorenz notes that commemorations of the 24 March coup garnered only tepid participation from the general public between the years of 1983 and 1993.²² Some years were hampered by military unrest and others by division within the human rights movement (*Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* actually split into two groups in 1986). The re-emergence of cultural negotiation with memory of dictatorship was felt across the artistic and institutional spectrum, inspiring one student to comment in 1998 that “the *proceso* appears in most Argentine films.”²³ When memory came to dominate journalistic, government, and cultural discourse in the mid 1990s, rock music was uniquely poised to participate in multiple ways.

²⁰Berti, *Rockologia*, 140.

²¹Berti, *Rockologia*, 140.

²²Lorenz, “Memorias de aquel veinticuatro,” 15-21.

²³Marta, a history student, was interviewed by Kaiser for *Postmemories of Terror*.

Susana Kaiser, author of *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the 'Dirty War,'* argued that, in 1998, there were three competing memories of the dictatorship.²⁴ These memory communities were: the military (who said the war against subversives was justified), human rights activists (who called the dictatorship a genocidal era, whose perpetrators remain unpunished), and an intermediate group who posited the theory of the two devils (military and terrorists) whose violence terrorized society.²⁵ While these three communities, no doubt, continue to hold some sway over the general public, I argue that the past ten years have seen the human rights activists come to dominate the commemorative scene. Kaiser's book is an exploration of postmemory, or the memories individuals with no direct experience of dictatorship nevertheless hold of the period. Kaiser submits that: "the generation of Argentines who were born during the dictatorship years have grown up with a 'second-generation memory characterized by displacement and belatedness.'"²⁶ In her evaluation of how Argentine youth have developed postmemories of dictatorship, Kaiser maintains that the principle means are via the media, educational institutions, and family discussions.²⁷ While I have no way to evaluate family discussions on any large scale, both the media and educational programs seem to have adopted a primarily pro-human rights stance which is often-times indicated by the inclusion of specific rock musicians in the programming. In order to evaluate the unique character of *rock nacional's* contribution to commemoration of dictatorship, I will first look to other cultural artifacts that emerged in the late 1990s.

²⁴ Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror*.

²⁵ Here Kaiser quotes Marianne Hirsch in "Projected Memory," *Acts of Memory*. See *Postmemories of Terror*, 7-8.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

²⁷ Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror*, 15.

Starting in 1996, Buenos Aires approved a law which established that “every year students will have classes, in the week of March 24, which remember the significance and consequences of the 1976 coup.”²⁸ That same year, a principle street in Buenos Aires was renamed after Azucena Villaflor, a founder of *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* who was disappeared by the state in 1977. The twentieth anniversary of the 24 March coup was the first time an Argentine president spoke at the occasion; Carlos Menem referred to the day as a day of horror, “although he defended his decision of having pardoned the ex-commandants.”²⁹

Rock nacional figured in this commemorative flurry in two key ways. First, as a way of animating this past, teachers invited León Gieco into the country’s classrooms where he played his music and discussed the dictatorship era with students.³⁰ Second, *Las Madres* organized a concert for commemoration that relied on the popularity of rock musicians to bring together an audience of twenty thousand youth.³¹ *Las Madres* have been astute promoters of their cause, and over the years have involved not only rock musicians, but Andean-folk groups like Coroico, and tango performers such as Adriana Verela. They have also enjoyed the involvement of international performers ranging from Sting to U2 to Yo-Yo Ma, all of whom have dedicated time and energy to the plight of the *desaparecidos*.³² What has evolved out of this history of human rights musical events is that *Las Madres* represent a specific seal of approval for Argentine performers who, by performing for their cause, join a worldwide list of high-ranking musicians.

²⁸ Lorenz, “Memorias de aquel veinticuatro,” 22.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Adriana Franco, “Las aulas se llenen de música con León,” *La Nación*, 16 August 1996,

³¹ Lorenz, “Memorias de aquel veinticuatro,” 22.

³² Karina Micheletto, “Para que las Abuelas nunca estén solas, “Música por la identidad,” *Página/12*, 03 June 2004.

The commemorative trend has continued for the past decade and, for the most part, illustrates that current public memory focuses primarily on recalling the victims of state terror as opposed to including those that were victims of terrorist groups. This can be seen geographically, in the location of monuments that have arisen spontaneously (the work of Human Rights activist groups) and in government-sponsored memorials. Since 1996, the HIJOS have been performing ‘*escraches*’ in which they congregate in front the homes of former military personnel and literally scratch out indictments on the pavement, thus publicly accusing these individuals of dirty war crimes. Other groups have taken to placing hand-made memorial plaques in front of homes from which people were disappeared.³³ The government has also played its part in setting up memorials to the disappeared, the most prominent example being the *Parque de la Memoria*.³⁴ The park faces the River Plate, thus recalling the death flights in its very location.

In 2000, Buenos Aires held a competition in which 3-D artists were asked to propose sculptures for the *Parque de la Memoria* which would pay homage to the victims of state terrorism from 1976-1983. Artists whose work was not selected for public display in 3-D format were offered second best: a 2D rendition of their proposed project was included in a gargantuan book entitled *665 proyectos presentados al Concurso en homenaje a los detenidos desaparecidos y asesinados por el terrorismo de estado en la Argentina* (665 projects presented to the Concourse in homage to the detained, disappeared, and assassinated by state terrorism in Argentina).³⁵ While the collection of

³³ Werner Pertot, “Las baldosas de la memoria,” *Página/12*, 2 April, 2006. This article reports that such memorials had been being set up for the past ten years.

³⁴ For a good overview of this memorial park, please access its website at: <http://www.parquedelamemoria.org.ar/>

³⁵ *Comisión Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado, 665 proyectos presentados al Concurso en homenaje a los detenidos desaparecidos y asesinados por el terrorismo de estado en la Argentina*

all these competing images provided one way of addressing multiple views of the past, its intention was still to remember those harmed at the hands of the state, and the selected art recalled only victims of state terror. Overlooked in this collection, and in many studies of memory in Argentina, is the impact guerrilla warfare had on many Argentines in the years prior to the coup. The art selected by the board of directors (made up of city officials, representatives from the University of Buenos Aires and members of Human Rights organizations), and its place in the city illustrates the tendency of both governmental officials and academics to commemorate only the victims of state terror.

The movement towards commemoration of this type has only intensified since the election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003. Kirchner is a left-leaning president and a representative of the Justicialista party—whose political ancestry dates back to Juan Perón's populism. This year, ten years after it was initially proposed, Kirchner succeeded in pushing through legislation which slated the 24 March as a national day of remembrance. His speech inaugurating this date as a 'día feriado' (loosely, a day off) commenced and finished with reference to *Las Madres* and *Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*, illustrating the unprecedented way in which his government has aligned with these human rights organizations. Memory scholar, Elizabeth Jelin, noted that:

In connection with memory issues, what is peculiar to the Southern Cone countries is the strong and visible presence of the human rights movement as a political actor and as an 'administrator' of memory.³⁶

Las Madres, therefore, have entered into a symbiotic relationship with both the Argentine government and Argentina's most prominent musicians, thus ensuring that their message continues to gather large crowds and an ever-youthful audience.

(Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2000).

³⁶ Jelin, *Labors of Memory*, 33.

When artists have chosen more complicated renderings of the dictatorship period, they have faced institutional obstacles that bare a disturbing resemblance to dirty war era censorship. Albertina Carri's 2003 film, *Los Rubios*, bucked the commemorative trend by undertaking an intellectual examination of the nature of memory. As literature and film scholar Joanna Page asserts,

Los Rubios combines the historical with the fantastical, and the traumatic with the entirely frivolous, in order to explore the pain of absence and the absence of pain, as one of the many paradoxes of the (non-)experience of postmemory. The result is a challenging reappraisal of the politics of representing the dictatorship...³⁷

Page illustrates that it was because of this atypical approach that Carri's film faced severe funding obstacles and sparked such a controversy in the media.³⁸

While there is no doubt that commemorative projects undertaken by both public and private bodies have amounted to an increased public awareness of the horrors of the dictatorship era, *rock nacional* and its idols have made unique contributions. Unlike monuments whose very permanence often leads to them blending into their surrounding landscape, and unlike independent films and TV documentaries whose impermanence means they are often easily forgotten, music has the unique characteristic of being both new (in the live performance) and enduring (in recordings and in the most popular songs which are staples of any concert playlist). Some films, such as *La Noche de los Lapices* which recounts the torture and disappearance of several adolescent art students in 1979, can boast a similar cultural endurance for years after their release.

³⁷ Joanna Page, "Memory and mediation in *Los rubios*: a contemporary perspective on the Argentine dictatorship," in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* (Vol. 3, 2005), 39.

³⁸ In yet another indication of the pervasive role of *rock nacional* on Argentine culture, one reviewer of this film entitled his article, "Pequeñas anécdotas sobre las instituciones," in clear reference to Charly García's 1974 album of the same name.

That music has a life outside of live performance contributes to its nature as marker of identity. Music scholar Simon Frith notes that:

tastes do not just derive from our socially constructed identities; they also help to shape them. For the last fifty years ... pop [and rock] music has been an important way in which we have learned to understand ourselves as historical, ethnic, class-bound, gendered subjects.³⁹

From a different perspective, memory scholar Alon Confino submits that:

collective memory is an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group, be it a family or a nation, whose members nonetheless have different interests and motivations.⁴⁰

The overlap between the way music can unite a group and the way collective memory can unite a group has formed an important part of *Las Madres'* public strategy, though it clearly arose naturally for many Argentines during and after the dictatorship era. As an example, I quote an email I received which had responded to the question: "What books, movies, pieces of art or music, or events, recall the dictatorship era or helped you to learn about that period?" Alejandra, quoting from memory says:

I remember perfectly the sad air that we breathed in those days. Sure, I didn't understand very well what had happened...I will write you part of a song, from that era, that we sang [for years afterwards] when we went camping in the mountains.⁴¹

Alejandra wrote out a song that epitomized, for her, the "impossible dream many youth [of that era] had of growing up." The song that she and her friends had sung in the Andes

³⁹Quoted in Pablo Vila, "Identidades narratives y música: Una primera propuesta para entender sus relaciones," *Revista Transcultural de Música/ Transcultural Music Review* 2 (1996), 9.

⁴⁰ Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (December 1997), 1389.

⁴¹ From personal correspondance, May 17, 2005.

in the early 1980s was Charly García's "Canción para mi muerte [Song for my Dead One]," from his 1972 album, *Vida*.⁴² It was his first album.

Another song from Charly García's repertoire can serve to illustrate the importance of the content of a cultural artifact and the period in which its meaning is interpreted. Originally released in 1984, García's song "Demoliendo Hoteles" (Demolishing Hotels) makes explicit reference to García's experience of growing up under the Videla regime.⁴³ Despite clear lyrics wherein the song's speaker claims to have fought for liberty without ever achieving it, many rock fans in the mid-1980s interpreted these lyrics according to the fan discourse which surrounded García at the time. Many recall the song as a narration not of dictatorship but of a cocaine-induced frenzy in which García tore apart a hotel room, hence the song title. In a 1995 re-release of the song, García changes the lyrics saying that he now can have liberty, a move which thus draws attention to the changed milieu between 1984 and 1995.⁴⁴ This example illustrates one of the unique aspects of rock music as a commemorative medium. In the case of superstar rockers like García and Gieco, the audience is constantly expanding. This means that it is a medium which creates postmemories in the post-dictatorship generation, while continuing to be relevant reminders for the first generation of fans, those of the dictatorship generation.

According to memory scholar Pierre Nora, modern people have lost their ability to engage in memory and have, instead, replaced the ritual and orality of memory of lore with vast archival collections, museums, statues and other *lieux de mémoire*. Nora

⁴² Charly García, "Canción para mi muerte," *Vida*, 1972. See the appendix for a full translation of the lyrics.

⁴³ Charly García, "Demoliendo Hoteles," *Piano Bar*, 1984. See the appendix for a translation of the lyrics.

⁴⁴ Charly García, "Demoliendo Hoteles," *Unplugged*, 1995.

defines a *lieu de mémoire* as

any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element in the memorial heritage of any community.⁴⁵

The 1985 trial of the military juntas could arguably be considered a *lieu de mémoire*, as could the published proceedings of the 1984 CONADEP findings, *Nunca Más*. Dominated *lieux de mémoire* are, “places of refuge, sanctuaries of instinctive devotion and hushed pilgrimages, where the living heart of memory still beats.” While a rock concert could hardly ever be considered hushed, it certainly has served as a sanctuary where audience members have had a unique capacity to participate (by singing or requesting certain songs) in the act of commemoration. It is for this reason that both governmental and human rights groups have repeatedly called upon *rockeros* to animate commemorative events.

While the fact of the alliance between *Las Madres* and musicians like León Gieco and Charly García begins to explain why these rockers became such important symbols of national memory, several other factors contributed. The urge to commemorate, as commented on by Pierre Nora, also had its impact on *rock nacional* which celebrated a thirtieth anniversary in 1996. Prior to that, Eduardo Berti points out that 1993 saw a boom in re-editions due to changing technology:

The boom of CD re-editions and from the movie, *Tango Feroz* in 1993, was comparable to the post-Malvina boom. In both cases a generation abandoned for a moment the current rankings, learned about the history of rock in Spanish [*Castellano*] and marvelled at themselves in their discovery.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Pierre Nora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History,” in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.

⁴⁶ Berti, “Epílogo,” in *Rockologia*, 166-167,

'Best of' CD collections were produced that invariably (some of their best hits were from the 1970s) included songs from the dictatorship period. "Los Dinosaurios" for example is rarely left off of Charly García's 'best of' albums, and León Gieco is basically synonymous with "Solo le pido A Dios." Their songs even appear on Mercedes Sosa's best of album, *30 Años*, where she sings alongside Gieco for "Solo le pido a Dios" and alongside García for "Inconciente Colectivo." This evidence establishes two things: first, that García and Gieco remain central figures on the rock scene in Argentina, and secondly that the anniversaries of *rock nacional* have provided recording companies with an excuse to re-release and re-market old hits to a new generation, thus providing possibly apathetic youth with a new means to learn about the dictatorial past.

In 1996, in celebration of thirty years of home-grown rock music, a swath of commemorative projects were launched. Historians and music specialists released books including *Todo Vale: Antologia Analizada de la Poesia Rock Argentina desde 1965* [Everything is Valued: [An] Analyzed Anthology of the Poetry of Rock since 1965]⁴⁷ and *Rockologia*⁴⁸ and a retrospective exhibit was launched in a municipal centre entitled: *Rock nacional, 30 Años*. Between October 18 and December 1 it boasted over one hundred thousand visitors, and thirty thousand just in the final weekend.⁴⁹ In addition to having performances by both *rock nacional*'s greats and newer musicians, it showed videos and archival material intended to illustrate the history of the genre. Visitors interested in knowing more or in keeping a memento of their visit could purchase a CD-Rom set whose cover proclaimed: "La Historia de *Rock nacional*...tambien es tu

⁴⁷ *Todo Vale: Antologia Analizada de la Poesia Rock Argentina desde 1965*.

⁴⁸ Berti, *Rockologia*.

⁴⁹ Adriana Franco, "Un cierre a toda orquesta," *La Nación*, 3 December 1996.

historia.[The history of *rock nacional* is also your history.]” This comprehensive collection boasted:

More than 500 groups, more than 350 photos, more than 300 album covers, more than 100 themes, more than 2 ½ hours of music, more than 1 hour of video, more than 200 diverse objects, manuscripts, drawings, instruments.

A journalist writing about the closing weekend focused on the shows, one by the 1970s band, *Aquelarre* whose song, “‘Violencia en el parque’, ese himno de los setenta, que preanunciaba la pesadilla. Sonaron bien, e hicieron emocionar a muchos. [‘Violence in the park,’ this anthem of the 1970s, that foresaw the nightmare. It sounded great and made a lot of people emotional].”⁵⁰ The show ended with Andrés Calamaro and León Gieco singing Pete Seeger’s “Guantanamera,” and Gieco singing his own “Sólo le Pido a Dios.” By being displayed in the *Centro Municipal de Exposiciones*, it came under the governance of the City of Buenos Aires, thus marking the entrance of *rock nacional* into a newly coded space of national treasures. This would continue in 2001, when *La Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Histórico Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* organized a conference dedicated to the early days of *rock nacional* and its influence on *porteño* culture.⁵¹ Music specialists and musicians (ranging from early rockers such as Litto Nebbia and music critics such as Pipo Lernoud and Pablo Vila) were involved in both events, signifying a changing location for *rock nacional* on the cultural map of Argentina.

Not only did music companies and museum directors change the position of rock music on the national scene, rockers themselves began to play increasingly with symbols

⁵⁰ Franco, “Un cierre a todo orquesta,” 1996.

⁵¹ “El rock nacional bajo la lupa,” *La Nación*, 16 April 2001.

of the nation by re-recording the national anthem and naming themselves president of the nation. In 1990, Charly García caused tremendous uproar when he released his own recording of the national anthem causing his album “Filosofía barata y zapatos de goma [Cheap Philosophy and Rubber Shoes]” to be held up in a trial wherein García was accused of mocking national symbols.⁵² The significance of this is illustrated by the inclusion of the “Himno Nacional Argentino,” in Alejandro Rozitchner’s book *Escuchá Qué Tema: La filosofía del rock nacional*, García managed to bring the symbols of the nation into the discourse of rock music.⁵³ Analyzed alongside songs like “Demasiado Presión” by Los Fabulosos Cadillacs and “Nada Personal” by Soda Stereo, the “Himno Nacional Argentino” becomes part of rock discourse, and likewise puts music by Los Cadillacs, Soda Stereo, Los Redonditos de Ricotta, and Fito Paez, in the same category as the national anthem.⁵⁴ Apart from listing Charly García as the performer of the national anthem (alongside Vicente Lopez y Planes, Blas Parera, the original composers) and the date (1813)—it is the only dated song in the book—Rozitchner just analyses the song like he would any other famous rock song. While the national media may not have liked this, Argentine youth were thrilled. One García fan wrote into *Pelo* to say: “Ustedes que lo concen feliciten a Charly García por el respeto y calidad que puso para lograr una versión distinta del Himno Nacional. Gracias. [Those of you who know him, congratulate Charly García on the respect and quality that he achieved in his distinct

⁵² When unauthorized musicians create their own versions of National Anthems, it is often controversial. The “Star Spangled Banner” was given a new twist by Jimi Hendrix at the close of Woodstock wherein an electric version managed to reference the American involvement in the Vietnam War. This year, a Spanish version, faithfully translated as “Nuestro Himno Nacional,” also sparked controversy when George W. Bush lamented that the anthem should only be sung in English, thus alienating (again) much of the Latin American contingent in the US.

⁵³ Rozitchner, *Escuchá Qué Tema: la filosofía del rock nacional*.

⁵⁴ For Alejandro Rozitchner’s analysis of “Himno Nacional Argentino,” see *Escuchá Qué Tema: la filosofía del rock nacional*, 86-92.

version of the National Anthem].”⁵⁵ It may not have been exactly how adults in the country would have liked García to promote national culture, but youth loved it. Twelve years later, in 2002, it was García’s version of the national anthem that brought him and *rock nacional* into one of the most important cultural spaces in the nation: Teatro Colón. There, wearing an Armani suit and new shoes, García played his “Himno Nacional” for an audience of ballet lovers, thus bringing *rock nacional* into yet another unimagined place.⁵⁶ That same year, García was awarded the *Premio Gardel de Oro*, thus joining the ranks of previous winners León Gieco and Mercedes Sosa.⁵⁷

In July of 1999, Charly García brought *rock nacional* to the presidential residence at 5 de Olivos. His visit with then President Carlos Menem has been one of his most controversial flirtations with Argentina’s most powerful institutions and a marked change from the era of *Pequeñas anécdotas sobre las instituciones*. In referencing “Demoliendo Hoteles,” a writer for *La Nación*, noted the about face:

The guy that wrote one song in which he claimed to have been born without power demonstrated a change of strategy in the last decade: by bringing himself as close to the institutional powers as possible so that, once there, he can beat the guy. [García was quoted as saying:] ‘The presidents have to do a campaign, to sell themselves, to sell out with others. And then I go, play the National Anthem and I have more power than they do.’⁵⁸

The same year that García went to enjoy an *asado* [an Argentine barbeque] with Carlos Menem, he played at a concert entitled Buenos Aires Vivo III which was dedicated to *los desaparecidos*. Charly García planned to open the concert on the River Plate by

⁵⁵ Gustavo Minuth, “Correo: Paz y Amor,” *Pelo*, December 1990. Something I find striking about this letter is the familiarity with which it is written. The writer assumes the editors at *Pelo* know García personally, as is also found in another edition where a letter writer asks the editors to wish him a Happy Birthday, “Feliz Cumpleaños Charly,” *jjj*.

⁵⁶ Sebastián Ramos, “Charly García y su versión del Himno,” *La Nación*, 25 May 2002.

⁵⁷ <http://www.rock.com.ar/notas/0/158.shtml>

⁵⁸ Sebastián Ramos, “Charly García: ‘Yo tengo poder real’,” *La Nación*, 16 June 2004.

simulating the death flights that had killed thousands of Argentines. Military planes were to be flown just above and behind the stage where they would drop life-sized figures into the river in commemoration of the disappeared. Though García may have felt all-powerful when compared with the president of the nation, it turned out that *Las Madres* could still put him in his place. *Las Madres* deemed his proposed homage to the disappeared a crass spectacle and protested. The simulated death flight was cancelled. It was a revealing moment: unlike all of the other institutions in Argentina – the church, the media, the government, the education system, the army –only *Las Madres* held enough sway for García to decide not to transgress their desired representation of the past.

In 1995 Charly García recorded, as was the trend, an ‘Unplugged’ album for MTV in Miami. Included on this album were songs I have mentioned throughout this study: “Eiti Leida,” “Viernes 3AM,” “Los Dinosaurios” and “Demoliendo Hoteles.” The recording captures an interesting moment. Before singing “Los Dinosaurios,” García says, in Spanish, “*Una canción que le gusta mucho todo el mundo, sobre todos los muertos*, [A song that everyone likes, about all of the dead].” After the last verse, over thundering applause, in English he petitions the audience to “Join Amnesty.” Miles from home, García chose earnest requests as part of his performance that day.

While some journalists have cited García’s recent engagement with human rights organizations and governing bodies as a return to polemics, others have found the manic twists and turns of García’s allegiances too much to bear. His high-profile position has made his antics that much more visible and that much more problematic for deciding how to classify him:

The first thing that jumps into view is how the author of “*Los dinosaurios*,” the very same that chained himself to the Chilean embassy in order to protest

Pinochet's dictatorship, went to play at Olivos [the presidential palace] for the president that declared the pardons.⁵⁹

The man whose audiences chanted, "Se siente, se siente, Charly presidente [We feel it we feel it, Charly presidente]" and were corrected by the singer with: "¡Rey, boludos! [King, assholes!]" has been an important part of commemorating the past, but León Gieco has proven to be a less complicated monument.

Where Charly García has been a chameleon-like hero, León Gieco has been a steadfast icon to the human rights movement. Aware of his impact on public memory, Gieco has chosen his path carefully. In the early 1980s, as rock became a mass culture, Gieco abandoned the recording industry completely. For three years, he undertook a tour of the country entitled "De Ushuaia a la Quiaca," which brought him to large and small communities throughout the nation wherein each stop was coordinated by local highschool students. His tour aimed to bring his music to the country and for him to learn more about indigenous music throughout Argentina; each concert featured his band and a local band that had competed for time on stage with Gieco. For their efforts, the highschool students gained thirty percent of the ticket sales which were to be put to use for any local cause of their choice. This unorthodox tour is the stuff of legend and is often cited by commentators as a justification for continuing to refer to Gieco as an "authentic musician." The "De Ushuaia a la Quiaca" tour anchored Gieco in a much broader human rights discourse that had impact throughout Latin America: that which promoted indigenous culture.

In the past decade, León Gieco has come to occupy an increasingly central place

⁵⁹ Víctor Pintos, "Demasiado ego, demasiado," rock.com.ar 07.08.1999., <http://www.rock.com.ar/notas/0/18.shtml>

alongside the human rights organizations in Argentina and institutions that have begun to recognize the importance of remembering the past in order to prevent its repetition. In 1996, an interview with Gieco discussed the various projects he was working on, which included the then very live confrontation in Mexico:

What I am about to record is a theme for the album “Chiapas”. I’m still not sure, but I am composing a song especially based on a letter which Subcommandante Marcos sent to some youth in the war zone between Ecuador and Peru.⁶⁰

Apart from engaging in issues plaguing other areas of Latin America, he was, at the time, re-releasing a collection of music from the “De Ushuaia a la Quiaca” tour for its use in schools, where he was personally going in to talk to high school students about the importance of poetry and history:

The clinic is about Argentine music, but it is also about life. I talk to them about human rights, *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, the HIJOS, and the necessity of collective song.⁶¹

By being such a constant voice of the marginalized in both Argentina and elsewhere, Gieco has become an important monument to the dictatorship.

In contrast, therefore, with Charly García, León Gieco has taken a pro-active approach in his role as one of Argentina’s prominent citizens, something that scholars of culture and memory in Argentina have overlooked. Tzvetan Todorov, whose work focuses on memory of the Holocaust, recognizes that politicians constantly make use of the past and suggests that there are good and bad ways through which this can be done:

I respect those who mourn their own dead, but I admire more those who come to transform their pain into a mode of preventing [its recurrence].⁶²

⁶⁰ Adriana Franco, “Las aulas se llenen de música con León,” *La Nación*, 16 August 1996.

⁶¹ Idem.

⁶² Finkelkraut et al., *Du bon usage de la mémoire*, 33-34.

Because León Gieco has taken the additional step of encouraging youth to engage in a broader understanding of the context in which youth were disappeared during the dictatorship, he provides one of the most useful contributions to commemoration.

In 2001, León Gieco was awarded the *Premio Gardel a Mejor Artista Masculino de Rock* and four years later was named *Ciudadano Ilustre de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, an event which was attended by artists, political figures and a large group of figures from the human rights institutions, including *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*. In 2004, in front of the *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada*, then President Nestór Kirchner announced that the ESMA would be made into a Museum of Memory, a *lieux de mémoire* that would commemorate the victims of the Dirty War. The ESMA was the longest running concentration camp during the Dirty War, and is located in central Buenos Aires. Framed photographs of military ‘greats’ General Videla, Admiral Massera, and Brigadier General Agosti would be removed from the *Salón de Honor*. A writer for *La Nación* noted that ‘los aplausos únicamente fueron civiles [only civilians applauded].’⁶³ After Kirchner’s speech, two concentration camp survivors who had then been teenagers recalled their time inside the ESMA. Members of the military stood detached and unimpressed. *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* surveyed the scene. Finally, a rock star beheld his audience and put memory to good use. Singing a song of his own composition, León Gieco’s “La Memoria” captured the highs and lows of recent Argentine history—recalling the disappeared, the trials, the pardons—and balanced his song with reference to injustice throughout Latin America by referencing the 1981-82 genocide in Guatemala and the

⁶³ Román Lejtman, “La memoria, el mejor antidoto para cualquier tipo de obediencia debida,” *Página/12*, 25 May 2004.

1968 Tlaltelolco massacre in Mexico.⁶⁴ Calling memory the dream, spine, refuge, and weapon which holds and charges history and life, León Gieco captured the hopeful, weighted discourse which surrounds the term ‘memory’. This moment not only cemented the government’s commitment to wading into the murky waters of memory, but illustrated the centrality musicians like Gieco have come to have in this discourse. According to newspaper reports from that day, thousands of spectators were gathered when Kirchner made his announcement.⁶⁵ This is an amazing turn-out for what was little more than a politician making an announcement, leading one to wonder: would these people have gathered there were it not for the presence of the revered folk rock legend, León Gieco?

Gieco managed not only to gather thousands of spectators, but also to inspire a rethinking of the role of memory through the use of a chorus that changed subtly throughout the song. Audience members could quickly capture the essence of the repetition: *Todo esta guardado en la memoria, sueño de la vida y de la historia* [Everything is kept in memory, dream of life and history]. By subtly changing the chorus to *Todo esta clavado en la memoria, espina de la vida y de la memoria* [Everything is coded in memory, backbone of life and memory] Gieco prompted his audience to reflect on a changing definition and use of memory. Through these subtle definitional shifts and through his references to injustice throughout Latin America, Gieco encouraged spectators to reflect on the role of memory not only their own society but throughout the American continent.

⁶⁴ See the appendix for a full translation of “La Memoria.”

⁶⁵ Idem.

This past year was the thirtieth anniversary of the military coup of 24 March 1976. Surpassing the activities of all other years, more was done than ever before to commemorate the past, and *rock nacional* and León Gieco found themselves at privileged points in this discourse. On March 24, 2006, *rock nacional* was featured in newspaper articles, radio shows and television programs. People interested, for example, in taking part in “*actividades de ayuda-memoria* [activities to help memory],” could listen to a six-hour program entitled “Rock y Dictadura,” on the radio.⁶⁶ Or they could read newspaper articles, one of which was by Sergio Pujol who said:

the music was, simply and dramatically, a chink in the wall, a gap through which we could visualize as much the outside world as the immediate past of the country. For moments, thanks to the balm of concerts and disks, we imaginarily escaped the coordinates of the dictatorship.⁶⁷

By reminding readers, in 2006, of the relief such concerts and songs provided, Pujol was speaking not only to the generation who had experienced dictatorship first hand, but to the generation that had followed. León Gieco was one of five people interviewed by *Página/12* in the section “Mi 24 de marzo,[My 24th of March]” where he recounted what we have seen elsewhere, the tranquility of the day, his trials with censorship and his confrontations with the authorities.

Similar to how the newspapers provided special space for León Gieco in their commemorative pages, so Sergio Pujol, author of *Rock y Dictadura*, considered Gieco to be *rock nacional*’s most significant figure. In an interview about the book, Pujol was asked who he considered to be the most heroic of the rockers, a question which in itself

⁶⁶ Rock y dictadura. Programa especial de 6 horas. Hoy desde las 16. FM. Universidad 107.5 Mhz.

⁶⁷ Sergio Pujol, “Los refugios de la música,” *Clarín X*, 24 March 2006.

assumes the elevated status of *rockeros* in Argentina (surely this question is not posed about soap opera stars). Pujol responded:

León Gieco. Because one sees in him a grand stubbornness, a great conviction from an ideological position that is more heterogenous...He wasn't a man that had a militant conscience, he was a progressive Argentine who sympathized with Frejuli [a Justicialista politician] in 1973 like so many others.⁶⁸

Not a member of the resistance, but still a hero. This is an important distinction which explains why *rock nacional* has become such a central genre in the commemoration of dictatorship and why León Gieco, in particular, has become the face for such commemoration. Because these musicians were not members of the resistance—not *Montoneros* nor ERP—they do not stir up the messy part of the history which Mark Osiel has asked historians to remember, that pre-1976 terrorism was, indeed, a terrible destabilizing force in the country.⁶⁹ While Elizabeth Jelin has argued that the mid 1990s were a period when memory of dictatorship became more nuanced, the way in which rock musicians are used in public discourse about the dictatorship suggests something altogether different: that the general public is looking for a simplified memory, a consecration rather than a complication. While figures like Gieco do offer a mode of remembering that challenges audiences to be active participants rather than passive observers, the problem of how to commemorate victims of 1970s terrorist groups remains.

Additionally, in this flurry of commemoration, it is not that rock music as a whole is being commemorated, it is only rock produced during the 1970s. Rock from the 1980s and 1990s, with its attendant messages about current social problems of AIDS,

⁶⁸ Martín Pérez, interview with Sergio Pujol, "Esperando Nacer," *Página 12*, 13 November 2005.

⁶⁹ Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Ordinary Evil, and Hannah Arendt*, 12-13.

hyperinflation, poverty, and lack of access to education and basic services, is not included in this monument because these are not something the government can make any claim to having surpassed. What is significant about the use of Gieco (and sometimes García) in commemoration is that they do not complicate the history in the way scholars like Jelin and Todorov suggest is necessary. What they do do is to animate commemoration, which is no small task.

In examining the consequences of the bringing *rock nacional* into commemoration, it can be seen that neither García nor Gieco revive what is perhaps the most contentious aspect of memory in Argentina: the destabilizing impact guerrilla warfare had in the years prior to the coup of 1976. Because neither Gieco nor García were militants, they can stand in for the more comfortable narrative of disappearances which submits that most of *los desaparecidos* were innocent victims. Nor do these musicians animate the memories of those who legitimately had a better life under dictatorship. Regardless of the shaky ground upon which this was constructed, many Argentines recall the Videla years as the most stable period that Argentina had had for decades.

In June 2005, Charly García gave a concert in “el Salon Blanco de la Casa Rosada.” Preceded by an interview with President Kirchner, García later said that he thought Kirchner was “supersimpático,” and that the president was a fan of his music.⁷⁰ As García had noted about his earlier discussions with Carlos Menem, President Kirchner and Charly were contemporaries. As Spinetta noted in the 1990s, “El rock dejó de ser rebelde y de estar en contra de los viejos a partir que los propios padres son los rockeros

⁷⁰ “Charly revolucionó la Rosada,” *La Nacion*, 3 June 2005.

[Rock stopped being rebellious and being against old folks when ones own fathers are themselves rockers].”⁷¹ *Rock nacional* can now boast generations of music fans, and its endurance from dictatorship to democracy has made it an important monument to certain aspects of the years of authoritarian rule. As rock musicians continue to be popular history makers and their music gets canonized as national treasure, it is only fitting that these figures and these songs find their place alongside other *lieux de mémoire*, revitalizing the past and singing to the future.

⁷¹ Quintana and de la Puente, *Todo Vale*, 221.

Conclusion

Charly García and León Gieco, though sometimes stage-mates, brought to *rock nacional* very different approaches and concerns. García—cosmopolitan, intellectual, city-born and educated—sang about the abandoned city, his faltering faith, censorship and disappearance. Gieco—rural-born, son of a worker—sang about worker's rights, the *pueblo* unaware of its own history, pacificism, and monsters in the jungle. Together, Gieco and García have traversed the cities and pampas of Argentina for over three decades; in doing so, they have brought the city to the desert and the *pueblo* to the city, sharing with multitudes their popular histories of Argentina. Through references to the realities of censorship and disappearance these musicians have sung out the story of thousands of Argentine youth; the ongoing popularity of their music today makes it a commemorative vehicle of the Dirty War.

One of the current major challenges facing Argentina is the question of how youth can come to relate to the painful history of dictatorships that they did not experience themselves. It is through the construction of *lieux de mémoire* in all the forms outlined by Pierre Nora that Argentina hopes to combat the apathy of youth to this period. Since the public confessions of former military officer Adolfo Scilingo in 1996, school curriculum, parks, parades, national holidays, museums, websites, art, and scholarship have been increasingly dedicated to commemorating dictatorship. For younger generations with no direct experience of the Dirty War, this amounts to what Marianne Hirsch referred to as postmemory, or the inculcation of memories which are not ones own. I argue that *rock nacional* has been pivotal in the animation of these memories in many of these *lieux de mémoire*.

By calling on figures like León Gieco and Charly García, governing officials and academics have attempted to animate these *lieux*, thus avoiding the major pitfall of stone monuments: their disappearance. Monuments lose their importance through familiarity, fading into the background of the everyday. They are re-animated, argues Annie Coombes, when they are changed.¹ When Charly García sings the national anthem in the Teatro Colon, he brings with him not only frenetic energy but a historical weight that invokes the past through his presence. When León Gieco sings “La Memoria” in front of the ESMA, he too brings the weight of years of human-rights concerts and struggles, animating for his spectators both past and current struggles.

Despite the necessity to stave off apathy to this dark period in recent Argentine history, the memory evoked through government-staged *lieux de mémoire* suffers from one of the central problems Tzvetan Todorov sees in public commemoration. The parades, national holidays and human rights concerts commemorate the past without historicizing it. This has become especially evident as the symbiosis between *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* and the current government of Néstor Kirchner has solidified since his election in 2003.² Both the government and *Las Madres* have made special effort to involve 1970s *rockeros* in their events. What is overlooked in their narrations of the past is precisely what I think unites these three parties. Their narration of dictatorship overlooks the instability guerrilla warfare caused in the years preceding the coup. According to Paul Lewis, “for the [1960-70s] guerrilla-terrorist, nonviolent

¹ Coombes, *History After Apartheid*.

² In June 2005, Argentina’s Supreme Court struck down the impunity laws (*Ley de Punto Final* and *Obediencia Debida*) and this year, in August 2006, a former police officer was tried and convicted for the first time in two decades for crimes he committed during the dictatorship. Please see: Debora Rey, “Argentine Given 25 Years for Dirty War Deeds,” *The Globe and Mail*, 4 August 2006.

action was insufficiently revolutionary because it assumed a fundamental link in values between the oppressor and the victim.”³ Neither *Las Madres*, many of whom took up the causes their children died for, nor political parties such as Kirchner’s Peronist *Justicialista* party, nor *rockeros* were violent resistors to the military. In fact, figures like García actually flourished in the dictatorship context because of their nuanced resistance-to-cum-participation-in dictatorship values. While there was much about the music that rejected the authoritarian regime, a lot of the music also reproduced societal norms that valued masculinity, folk and tango musical traditions, symbols of Christianity, and the Spanish language. Likewise, *Las Madres* were certainly shielded from violent recrimination because the military’s gender norms allowed the junta to overlook their demands by dismissing them as nothing more than *Las Locas* [The Crazy Ladies].

On the morning of the thirtieth anniversary of the 24 March 1976 coup, President Kirchner opened the first *Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia*, [National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice], with a speech. In it, he praised the ongoing work of Argentina’s grassroots human rights groups such as *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, *HIJOS*, and *Las Abuelas*. In addition to calling upon Argentines to remember the disappeared, Kirchner paved the way for what could become a more complicated rendering of Argentina’s recent past. While lambasting the role of the military, the Catholic Church, and some sectors of the press, Kirchner summoned Argentines to reflect on the overall passivity Argentine society had had towards the coup of 24 March 1976. This echoes the findings of scholar Patricia Marchak who, after having conducted 118 interviews of Argentines, concluded that, “the military itself was a

³ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 33.

creation of the society on which it preyed.”⁴ This shift suggests that the commemorative environment is starting to change, and may even begin to address role of guerrilla warfare as a catalyst for the military’s violence. While *rock nacional* has undoubtedly been a poignant monument to *los desaparecidos*, this music is rich with references to the multiple ways in which Argentine society was ripe for a military coup in the mid-1970s. Kirchner would do well to call upon animators such as Charly García and other *rockeros* if he aims to provide what Todorov and Jelin would consider a complicated history and what we might call a moving monument. The very building blocks of this rocking monument—its lyrics, its melodies, the charisma of its animators, its locales and its audience—would ensure that memory of the Argentine Dirty War would be a dynamic and challenging *lieux de mémoire* for generations to come.

⁴ Marchak, *God’s Assassins*, 20.

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Appendix

Canción para mi muerte; Sui Generis. Charly García, 1972

Song for my Dead One

Hubo un tiempo que fue hermoso
y fui libre de verdad,
guardaba todos mis sueños
en castillos de cristal.
Poco a poco fui creciendo,
y mis fábulas de amor
se fueron desvaneciendo
como pompas de jabón.

Te encontraré una mañana
dentro de mi habitación
y prepararás la cama
para dos.

Es larga la carretera
cuando uno mira atrás
vas cruzando las fronteras
sin darte cuenta quizás.
Tomate del pasamanos
porque antes de llegar
se aferraron mil ancianos
pero se fueron igual.

Te encontraré una mañana
dentro de mi habitación
y prepararás la cama
para dos.

Quisiera saber tu nombre
tu lugar, tu dirección
si te han puesto teléfono,
también tu numeración.
Te suplico que me avises
si me vienes a buscar,
no es porque te tenga miedo,
sólo me quiero arreglar.

Te encontraré una mañana
dentro de mi habitación
y prepararás la cama
para dos.

There was a time that was beautiful
and I was truly free
I kept all my dreams
In castles made of crystal.
Little by little I was growing up
And my love fables
left in bursts
Like soap bubbles

I'll find you one morning
In my room
And you will prepare the bed
For two.

It's long, the route
when I look back
you will be crossing borders
Without realizing maybe
you'll take the handrail
because before arriving,
a thousand old people clung,
But they left the same, anyway

I will find you one morning
in my room
And you will prepare the bed
For two.

I would like to know your name
your place, your address
if you have put in a phone,
And your numbering too.
I'm asking you to tell me
if you come in search of me
It's not because I'd be afraid of you
Just that I'd like to get ready.

I will find you one morning
In my room
And you will prepare the bed
For two.

El fantasma de Canterville; Sui Generis. Charly García, 1974

The Ghost of Canterville

Yo era un hombre bueno
si hay alguien bueno en éste lugar.
Pagué todas mis deudas,
pagué mi oportunidad de amar.

Sin embargo, estoy tirado,
y nadie se acuerda de mí,
paso a través de la gente,
como el fantasma de Canterville.

Me han ofendido mucho
y nadie dio una explicación.
Ay! si pudiera matarlos,
lo haría sin ningún temor.

Pero siempre fui un tonto
que creyó en la legalidad.
ahora que estoy afuera,
yo sé lo que es la libertad.

Ahora que puedo amarte
yo voy a amarte de verdad,
mientras me quede aire,
calor nunca te va a faltar,

y jamás volveré a fijarme en la cara de los demás.
Esa careta idiota que tira y tira para atrás.

He muerto muchas veces
acribillado en la ciudad,
pero es mejor ser muerto que un número que
viene y va.

Y en mi tumba tengo discos
y cosas que no te hacen mal.
Después de muerto, nena,
vos me vendrás a visitar.

I was a good man
If there is a good person in this place.
I paid all my debts,
I paid my opportunity to love.

However, I am thrown out,
And no one remembers me.
I pass by the people,
Like the Ghost of Canterville.

They have offended me a lot
And no one gave an explanation.
Ay! If I could kill them,
I would do it without any fear.

But I was always a ridiculous person
Who believed in legality.
And now that I am outside,
I know what liberty is.

Now I can love you
And I will love you for real,
As long as I have air,
You will never lack for heat.

And I will never go back to look in the faces of the others.
Those idiotic fakes who keep looking back.

I have died many times
bombarded in the city,
But it is better to be dead than to be a number that
comes and goes.

And in my tomb I have albums
And things that don't make you feel bad.
After death, girl,
You will come and visit me.

Hombres de hierro; León Gieco, 1974
Men of Steel

Larga muchacho tu voz joven
como larga la luz el sol
que aunque tenga que estrellarse
contra un paredón
que aunque tenga que estrellarse
se dividirá en dos.

Suelta muchacho tus pensamientos
como anda suelto el viento
sos la esperanza y la voz que vendrá
a florecer en la nueva tierra.

Hombres de hierro que no escuchan la voz
hombres de hierro que no escuchan el grito
hombres de hierro que no escuchan el llanto.
Gente que avanza se puede matar
pero los pensamientos quedarán.

Puntas agudas ensucian el cielo
como la sangre en la tierra
dile a esos hombres que traten de usar
a cambio de las armas su cabeza.

Hombres de hierro que no escuchan la voz
hombres de hierro que no escuchan el grito
hombres de hierro que no escuchan el llanto.
Gente que avanza se puede matar
pero los pensamientos quedarán.

Large young man your young voice
Like the light of the sun expands
that even when you have to crash
into a thick wall
and even when you have to crash
You'll divide yourself into two.

Loose man, your thoughts
Like the wind is on the move
You are the hope and your voice will come
To flourish in the new land.

Men of steel who don't listen to the voice
Men of steel who don't listen to the scream
Men of steel who don't listen to the crying.
One could kill people who advance
But the thoughts will remain.

Sharp points dirty the sky
Like the blood in the land
Tell that to the men who try to use it
To change from their guns their head.

Men of steel who don't listen to the voice
Men of steel who don't listen to the scream
Men of steel who don't listen to the crying.
One could kill people who advance
But the thoughts will remain.

Sólo le pido a Dios; León Gieco, 1978
All that I ask of God

Sólo le pido a Dios
que el dolor no me sea indiferente,
que la reseca muerte no me encuentre
vacío y solo sin haber hecho lo suficiente.

Sólo le pido a Dios
que lo injusto no me sea indiferente,
que no me abofeteen la otra mejilla
después que una garra me arañó esta suerte.

Sólo le pido a Dios
que la guerra no me sea indiferente,

All that I ask of God
Is that the pain not make me indifferent,
That the dryness of death not find me
Empty and alone without having done what was necessary

All that I ask of God
Is that justice not make me indifferent,
That they not slap my other cheek
After a claw scratches my fate.

All that I ask of God
Is that war not make me indifferent,

es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte
toda la pobre inocencia de la gente.

It's a huge monster that takes strong steps
All the poor innocence of the people.

Sólo le pido a Dios
que el engaño no me sea indiferente
si un traidor puede más que unos cuantos,
que esos cuantos no lo olviden fácilmente.

All that I ask of God
Is that deception not make me indifferent
If a traitor can do more than some,
That they not easily forget.

Sólo le pido a Dios
que el futuro no me sea indiferente,
desahuciado está el que tiene que marchar
a vivir una cultura diferente.

All that I ask of God
is that the future not make me indifferent,
hopeless that one that needs to march
To live a different life.

Canción de Alicia en el País; Charly García, 1980
Song of Alice in the Country

Quién sabe Alicia éste país
no estuvo hecho porque sí
Te vas a ir, vas a salir
pero te quedas,
¿dónde más vas a ir?

Who knows Alice this country
Was not made because if
you will go, you will leave
But you stay,
Where else will you go?

Y es que aquí, sabes
el trabalenguas trabalenguas
el asesino te asesina
y es mucho para ti.
Se acabó ese juego que te hacía feliz.

And it is here, you know
The tongue twisters, tongue twisters
The assassin murders you
And it is too much for you.
The game has ended that used to make you happy.

No cuentes lo que viste en los jardines,
el sueño acabó.
Ya no hay morsas ni tortugas
Un río de cabezas aplastadas por el mismo pie
juegan cricket bajo la luna
Estamos en la tierra de nadie, pero es mía
Los inocentes son los culpables, dice su señoría,
el Rey de espadas.

Don't tell what you saw in the gardens,
The dream ended.
There are no walruses nor tortoises
A river of heads squashed by the same food
play cricket under the moon
We are in the land of no one, but it is mine
The innocent are the guilty, says her Lordship,
The King of Spades.

No cuentes lo que hay detrás de aquel espejo,
no tendrás poder
ni abogados, ni testigos.
Enciende los candiles que los brujos
piensan en volver
a nublarnos el camino.
Estamos en la tierra de todos, en la vida.
Sobre el pasado y sobre el futuro,
ruinas sobre ruinas,
querida Alicia.

Don't tell what you saw behind the mirror,
You won't have power
Nor lawyers, nor witnesses.
Light up the candles that the warlocks
Are planning to return
To cloud up the path.
We are in the land of everyone, in life
Over the past and over the future
Ruins upon ruins,
Dear Alice.

Se acabó ese juego que te hacía feliz.

The game is over that made you happy.

Los dinosaurios; Charly García, 1983

The Dinosaurs

Los amigos del barrio pueden desaparecer
los cantores de radio pueden desaparecer
los que están en los diarios pueden desaparecer
la persona que amas puede desaparecer.
Los que están en el aire pueden desaparecer en el aire
los que están en la calle pueden desaparecer en la calle.
Los amigos del barrio pueden desaparecer,
pero los dinosaurios van a desaparecer.

The friends of the neighbourhood can disappear
Singers on the radio can disappear
Those in the newspapers can disappear
The person that you love can disappear.
Those in the air can disappear in the air
Those in the street can disappear in the street.
The neighbourhood friends can disappear,
But the dinosaurs will disappear

No estoy tranquilo mi amor,
hoy es sábado a la noche,
un amigo está en cana.
Oh mi amor
desaparece el mundo
Si los pesados mi amor llevan todo ese montón de
equipajes en la mano
oh mi amor yo quiero estar liviano.
Cuando el mundo tira para abajo
yo no quiero estar atado a nada
imaginen a los dinosaurios en la cama
...

I am not peaceful my love,
Today is Saturday night,
A friend is in jail.
Oh my love
disappear (as a command) the world
If the weights, my love, take this tonne of baggage in hand

Oh, my love, I want to be frivolous.
When the world spins downwards
I don't want to be tied to anything
Imagine (all of you), the dinosaurs in bed
...

Demoliendo Hoteles; Charly García, 1984

Demolishing Hotels

Yo que nací con Videla
yo que nací sin poder
yo que luché por la libertad
y nunca la pude tener,
yo que viví entre fachistas
yo que morí en el altar
yo que crecí con los que estaban bien
pero a la noche estaba todo mal.

I who was born with Videla
I who was born without power
I who fought for liberty
And never could have it,
And me who lived with facists
And me who died at the altar
And me who grew up with those that were good
But at night were all bad.

Hoy pasó el tiempo,
demoliendo hoteles
mientras los plomos juntan los cables
cazan rehenes.
Hoy pasó el tiempo
demoliendo hoteles

Today I spent my time,
demolishing hotels
While the plumbers join the cables
They hunt hostages.
Today I spent my time
demolishing hotels

mientras los chicos allá en la esquina
pegan carteles.

Yo fui educado con odio
y odiaba la humanidad
un día me fui con los hippies y
tuve un amor y mucho más.
Ahora no estoy más tranquilo,
y por qué tendría que estar
todos crecimos sin entender
y todavía me siento un anormal

Hoy pasó el tiempo...

La Memoria; León Gieco, 2004
Memory

Los viejos amores que no están,
la ilusión de los que perdieron,
todas las promesas que se van,
y los que en cualquier guerra se cayeron.

Todo está guardado en la memoria,
sueño de la vida y de la historia

El engaño y la complicidad
de los genocidas que están sueltos,
el indulto y el punto final
a las bestias de aquel infierno

Todo está guardado en la memoria,
sueño de la vida y de la historia

La memoria despierta para herir
a los pueblos dormidos
que no la dejan vivir
libre como el viento

Los desaparecidos que se buscan
con el color de sus nacimientos,
el hambre y la abundancia que se juntan,
el mal trato con su mal recuerdo

Todo está clavado en la memoria,
espina de la vida y de la historia

Dos mil comerían por un año
con lo que cuesta un minuto militar

While the kids on the corner
Hitting signs.

I was educated with hate
I hated humanity
One day I went with the hippies and
I had to love and a lot more.
Now I'm not so peaceful,
And why must I be
Everyone believes without understanding
And I still feel abnormal

Today I spent my time...

The old loves who are no longer,
The illusion of those that we have lost,
All of the promises that leave us,
And those that in whatever war fell.

Everything is kept in memory,
Dream of live and history

The deception and the complicity
Of the genocides that are typical,
The pardons and the [final point law]
The beasts of that hell.

Everything is kept in memory,
Dream of life and of history

Memory awakens in order to hurt
The sleeping towns/ people
Which don't let them live
free like the wind

The disappeared that they look for
With the colour of their births,
They bring together hunger and abundance,
The bad treatment and its bad memory

Everything is coded in memory,
Backbone of life and history

Two thousand would eat for a year
With that which costs one military minute

Cuántos dejarían de ser esclavos
por el precio de una bomba al mar

Todo está clavado en la memoria,
espina de la vida y de la historia

La memoria pincha hasta sangrar,
a los pueblos que la amarran
y no la dejan andar
libre como el viento

Todos los muertos de la A.M.I.A.
y los de la Embajada de Israel,
el poder secreto de las armas,
la justicia que mira y no ve

Todo está escondido en la memoria,
refugio de la vida y de la historia

Fue cuando se callaron las iglesias,
fue cuando el fútbol se lo comió todo,
que los padres palotinos y Angelelli
dejaron su sangre en el lodo

Todo está escondido en la memoria,
refugio de la vida y de la historia

La memoria estalla hasta vencer
a los pueblos que la aplastan
y que no la dejan ser
libre como el viento

La bala a Chico Méndez en Brasil,
150.000 guatemaltecos,
los mineros que enfrentan al fusil,
represión estudiantil en México

Todo está cargado en la memoria,
arma de la vida y de la historia

América con almas destruidas,
los chicos que mata el escuadrón,
suplicio de Mugica por las villas,
dignidad de Rodolfo Walsh

Todo está cargado en la memoria,
arma de la vida y de la historia

How many would stop being slaves
For the price of bomb to the ocean

Everything is coded in memory,
Backbone of life and history

Memory pricks until bleeding,
At the towns/ people that tied it up
And don't let it (memory) go
free like the wind

All of the dead of A.M.I.A.
and those of the Israeli embassy,
The secret power of arms,
Justice that looks and doesn't see

Everything is hidden in memory,
Refuge of life and history

It was when the churches stayed silent,
It was when soccer consumed everything,
That the Palotino Fathers and Angelelli
Left their blood in the mud

Everything is hidden in memory,
Refuge of life and history

Memory bursts until defeating
The towns/ people that crush it (memory)
And don't allow it to be
Free like the wind

The bullet to Chico Méndes in Brazil,
150,000 Guatemalans,
The minors that face the rifle,
Student repression in Mexico

Everything is charged in memory,
Weapon of life and history

America with destroyed souls,
The children who kill the squadron (of police),
The torture of Mugica by the towns,
The dignity of Rodolfo Walsh

Everything is charged in memory,
Weapon of life and history

La memoria apunta hasta matar
a los pueblos que la callan
y no la dejan volar
libre como el viento.

Memory points until it kills
The people/ town who keep it silenced
And don't allow it to fly
free like the wind.