

The Argentine Rock and Roll Hero: Charly García and his Eternal Song

Mara Favoretto¹
mara.f@unimelb.edu.au

Abstract: Argentine rock musician Charly García (1951–) is arguably one of Latin America’s most outstanding artists and is especially renowned for his political resistance during the dictatorship years in Argentina. This article explores his particular way of dealing with the process of co-optation (GROSSBERG, 1984) in the democratic period. To avoid becoming another musician “consumed” by his commercial success, García constructed a parody of himself as a rock star, a theme that would characterise the rest of his career under democracy. Self-portrayed as a national “hero”, his songs thematically present all the elements that contribute to this heroic status, including a logo, an enemy, a mission and a set of maxims. His constructed hero’s philosophy can be described as a thematic eternal song.

Keywords: Charly García; Argentina; rock.

Resumo: O cantor argentino de rock Charly García (nascido em 1951) é, sem dúvida, um dos mais importantes artistas latino-americanos. García tornou-se famoso na época da ditadura militar, devido à mensagem de resistência política que ele passava através de suas músicas. Este artigo explora a sua maneira de lidar com o processo de cooptação (GROSSBERG, 1984) na era democrática. Para evitar tornar-se mais um artista “consumido” por sucesso comercial na indústria da música, García construiu uma paródia de si mesmo como estrela de rock. Dessa forma, o cantor caracterizou o resto de sua carreira durante a democracia com um título heróico, incluindo uma logomarca, um inimigo e uma missão. Suas canções apresentavam tematicamente todos os elementos que contribuíram para o seu autorretrato como um “herói” nacional. A filosofia de herói construída por ele pode ser descrita como a temática da canção eterna.

Palavras-chave: CharlyGarcía; Argentina; rock.

Esta canción durará por siempre
 porque yo mismo la hice así:
 una canción sin amor, sin dolor,
 la canción sin fin.
 (“Chipi Chipi”, *La hija de la lágrima*, 1994)

Introduction

Charly García is undoubtedly Argentina’s, and perhaps South America’s, most iconic rock and roll star. Since he began composing rock and roll songs in the 1960s, his popularity has grown to occupy a central position in the collective national imaginary of several generations of Argentines. García founded his first band in 1967 and is still producing and performing Argentine rock. Across the several decades of

¹ Dr Mara Favoretto is a lecturer in Spanish and Latin-American Studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Charly en el país de lasalegorías. Un viaje por las letras de CharlyGarcía* (2014), *Alegoría e ironía bajo censura en la Argentina del Proceso* (2010) and of numerous peer-reviewed research papers on the intersections among politics, power and popular culture in Argentina, with a special interest in popular music.

his career, García has transformed Argentine popular music in many ways. During his first years in the public eye, “he was a musical chronicler of the socio-political situation in his country, using his rock as a vehicle for protest” (PUJOL, 2007, p.66). Over the years, García achieved popularity and fame not only through his music and sophisticated lyrics, but also due to his constant transgressions and excesses, until he had succeeded at developing an entire system of symbols around him that to this day supports a self-constructed parody of himself as heroic rock star and national idol.

It is highly likely that most Argentines and many Latin Americans know of him and can identify many of his songs. His popular status as a “rock star” is undeniable and his public image is formed from anecdotes of his life as well as his artistic production. Trained in classical music, García combines the best of the classic with the modern and postmodern, redefining genres and styles to produce enigmatic effects. This article explores a theme in his artistic production: the construction of both a parodic image of himself as a “hero” (addressed as “Charly”) and what he deems his “eternal song”, a concept he includes in his lyrics and asserts the permanence of his music forever. García’s concept of the “never-ending song” as the eternal quality of his art is not only supported by his own performances and song lyrics; in December 2013 he was recognized by the Universidad de San Martín, Buenos Aires, with the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa for his contribution to Argentine music and culture. On this occasion, when he was receiving his diploma at the UNSAM, García said: “Now I’m a doctor and you are my patients”.

This apparent joke and play on words as well as its sinister echoes of the medical discourse used by the military dictators, also functions as one of the many elements that contribute to the parody he has created, and continues to maintain, of his heroic status. Interestingly, the joke may be a reference to the rhetorical context in which he became the hero of many young people who were listening to his music. During the Dirty War in Argentina, the military discourse was characterised by using medical metaphors and claiming that the regime was going to “cure the cancer in society”. More than thirty years later, the “healing” power seems to have changed hands, and although the “dinosaurs” have “disappeared” (as he nicknamed the generals in one of his songs and predicted the collapse of their regime), what remains and will remain is Charly’s music.

García did not decide he was going to become a hero the first time he sat at his piano. Before he started his career as a solo artist, before he created his “rock star” character and before the “say no more” era, García was writing phrases that professed

how different he was from his counterparts (“*mientras miro las nuevas olas, yo ya soy parte del mar*” [“Mientras miro las nuevas olas”, Serú Girán. *Serú Girán*, 1978]). Yet while in the 1970s and 1980s he wrote songs that asserted a gap between him and the rest of Argentina’s rock musicians, the songs that assert an heroic quality and make a parody of the rockstar figure would come later.

Sociologists such as Simon Frith (1981) and George Lewis (1983), among others, have focused on rock and roll as a product of the popular culture industry in capitalist societies. As of the 1950s, rock and roll became increasingly controlled by the entertainment industry and the stardom system. More often than not, rock and roll musicians re-invented themselves, not always successfully, to avoid falling into the traps of consumerism. Lawrence Grossberg (1984) suggests that “co-optation is the model by which rock and roll produces itself anew, rejecting moments of its past and present in order to all the more potently inscribe its own boundary” (p. 255). Charly García’s means of co-optation have involved a parodic construction of himself that he began to develop during his career’s early stages, but which became most eloquent in the past two decades of his output. If he had to become a star and a consumable cultural product, then he would be the one to handle some of the dynamics involved in the process.

The notion of co-optation and the return of the hero

The process of co-optation, according to Lawrence Grossberg, has been going on since the late 1950s:

[...] at each stage rock and roll loses its power and becomes a commodity that can be produced, marketed, and consumed. But it is also apparently true that each time it has happened, rock and roll breaks out of that co-opted stance and reaffirms its affective power, creating new sounds and new political stances. The result is that the history of rock and roll is read as a cycle of co-optation and renaissance in which rock and roll constantly protests against its own co-optation (GROSSBERG, 1984, p. 252).

As Grossberg explains, the notion of co-optation allows us to see the existence of rock and roll at the intersection of youth culture and the hegemony (p. 254). However, his studies are based mainly on Anglo rock and roll. In the Argentine case, the process described by Grossberg as co-optation takes an interesting turn in Charly García’s musical production and performance. García, as will be explored below, has indeed reconfigured himself and his music anew, and has inscribed his own affective relationship with his audience.

In his studies about the mythological hero published in the nineteenth century, the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor observes that most heroes follow the same pattern: they have a unique quality that is revealed when they are born, they are “saved” by other humans and, after having triumphed over a series of challenges, they become a national hero (TYLOR, 1863, pp. 21–32). Indeed, a mythical hero is constructed within basic parameters. The first and most important element is the presence of an enemy, some kind of danger from which the hero has to protect himself and his followers. The second element is a mission that he will have to achieve, even if this means facing his own death. Many times the mission appears as a labyrinth of challenges that he must use his physical and mental skills to overcome. His mission *is* the journey, his path until he reaches his final objective. The third element is a mark or sign that distinguishes him from the rest of humanity and highlights his superiority. This mark many times takes the form of a logo: Superman wears an S on his chest, Batman is well-known by his symbolic bats and the Rolling Stones have been associated with an image of a tongue poking out of a mouth. The trademark or logo reminds whoever sees it that they are before a transcendental and unique being whom they have to follow as their leader. The fourth element is a particular set of beliefs, a philosophy or series of principles that regulate his actions and will constitute his legacy to his people. These principles will be incorporated by his followers as teachings from the hero who saved them from their enemy, overcame challenges to achieve his mission and was willing to risk his life in their name. As a religion, as a cult, this set of principles will remain forever, even if the hero is no longer physically present in this world.

In his study about Argentine idols, Juan José Sebrelí explains that not everybody becomes a hero, but the person who does become one makes a conscious decision early in life and works towards this objective. Napoleon, he says, was a crazy guy who *believed he was* Napoleon (SEBRELI, 2008, p. 33). The idol, according to Sebrelí, is loved and looked up to:

Para lograr la admiración debe ser distinto, distante, inaccesible al común de la gente como los semi-dioses. Pero para ser amado tiene que parecerse al adorador, humano, demasiado humano. Precisa reunir en un delicado equilibrio características contrarias. Ser lejano en quien se proyectan los deseos incumplidos, el ídolo vive en el Olimpo de los ricos, famosos y poderosos. A la vez cercano y semejante para que el adorador pueda identificarse, necesita haber sufrido las mismas humillaciones y privaciones que el más desfavorecido (SEBRELI, 2008, p. 33).

Traditionally, heroes emerge from a symbolic experience: before knowing *who* they are, we know *what* they represent. First, we recognize their signs: their clothing, their conflict, the objects or tools they have available, even if they are not aware of them because they are more concerned about their mission than their identity. For example, at the beginning of the Hinduism sacred text, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the hero asks what he has to fight for but the answer he is given is that he should simply “keep fighting”. At the beginning of their life journeys, most heroes are not aware of their potential heroism and many times oscillate between an illusory and a real sense of freedom, until they manage to succeed and join both senses in one plane (FAVORETTO, 2014, p. 78). This fusion of freedom and illusion is clearly observable in García’s albums *Demasiado ego* (1999), *Rock and Roll Yo* (2003) and *Kill Gil* (2010).

Demasiado ego combines a selection of significant songs by composers and songwriters that have made an impact on García throughout his career, ranging from Handel (“Sarabande”) to the Beatles (“It’s only love”). It can be viewed as an album that summarizes the influence of music on García and viceversa. The images that illustrate the jewel case insert of this CD are newspaper clippings that clearly show the place the musician occupies in the Argentine collective imaginary, evident in headlines such as: “Volvió la luz”, “Todo Buenos Aires a los pies de Charly” and others that recall some of the debates and scandals in which he was involved, such as “Sin muñecos ni helicópteros Charly García no desentonó”, which refers to when García declared he would drop dummies from a helicopter into the river during his Buenos Aires Vivo III concert in emulation of the death flights during the dictatorship (1976–1983).² Such a performance never took place because Hebe de Bonafini, one of the founding members of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, talked him out of it. Episodes such as this abound in Charly’s career and were a prominent feature of his public image for many years.

Rock and Roll Yo presents cover art by Charly and includes “V.S.D.” (Vossosdios), a song composed by Joaquín Sabina and SNM (Say No More), followed by a second version of the same song – same lyrics, different music – called “Tango”. In this song, the status of the hero is explicit: “*Vossosdios, vossos Gardel, vos lo más*” and both musical versions of the same lyrics seem to condense the fusion between rock, tango and the idolized image of García.

² During the dictatorship, thousands of prisoners were stripped of their clothes, drugged and thrown alive into the river in Buenos Aires. This fate was known as the death flights (*vuelos de la muerte*), which are meticulously documented and explored in Horacio Verbitsky’s book *El vuelo* (1995).

Kill Gil's jewel case insert is also illustrated with García's drawings, but this time the album is accompanied by a DVD of animated versions of those drawings. On the cover of the insert we can see the shadows of a figure, presumably García. Falling from his fingers are marionette-like strings and attached to the threads one can read the phrase "Pull the strings". Through the shadow figure, García alludes to an apparent enjoyment of pulling the strings and, therefore, controlling situations. This image of being in control reaffirms García's status as god, as described in "V.S.D."

As opposed to what traditionally happens with heroes, García has appeared to be acutely aware of his "mythical" quality precisely because *he* has been in charge of creating, developing and exploiting it. Indeed, García describes his own originality when he says: "*Acá no había estrellas de rock, solo había músicos de rock, hasta que yo me la inventé*" (AA.VV, 2006, p. 59). This is not a traditional moralist hero but a revolutionary one who provokes and challenges his audience, questioning whether his art is received in the way he intends: "How can you think I'm crazy when I give you a morning star?" ("In the city that never sleeps", *Kill Gil*, 2010), "si en verdad me tomás en serio deberías saber porqué" ("Deberías saber porqué", *El Ángel vigía, 60x60*, 2012).

The next sections study the four elements in García's songs that help create an allegorical hero: his logo, his mission, his enemy and his set of beliefs, bearing in mind that the construction of this heroic character is a parody created by García himself.

The logo: "Talk to my statue!"

A real hero whom generations will remember needs a distinct logo that identifies him quickly and separates him from other heroes. Superman wears a letter S on his chest, Batman is well known through his symbolic bats and the Rolling Stones are associated with the famous tongue. García, in turn, created SNM (Say No More), an idea inspired by a line he heard in one of the Beatles' films. As such, his logo was built on European foundations, just as in the nineteenth century, in times of nation-building, Argentine leaders looked to Europe as an ideal to imitate. Nowadays, SNM is a cult-like armband for Charly's audience that has become a well-known symbol, to the point that a giant armband was placed around the iconic obelisk in the city of Buenos Aires to promote Charly's return to the stage in 2009 after he emerged from a period of rehabilitation.

The massive broadcast of an image of the idol – that is, iconography as propaganda – has been around since classical antiquity. The first to employ this strategy was Alexander the Great, who used his own face on coins and medals. Later, other Roman emperors ordered the construction and display of huge statues in their image, and since the Renaissance the powerful have commissioned portraits of themselves and paintings depicting scenes of their charming family life (SEBRELI, 2008, p. 25). These iconic images always have to do with the claiming of territory, leadership and sovereignty. In the territory of Argentine rock, Charly made sure to represent himself as leader. As he has demonstrated in many of his songs, he is deeply aware of how the Argentine being functions; he gets it. And he probably gets how nationalism works through music. Perhaps that is why he decided to perform his own version of the Argentine National Anthem and record it in his album *Filosofía barata y zapatos de goma* (1990). Therefore, the logo SNM was created to complement and further develop the process García had started when he included in his repertoire the most sacred national symbol: the song to the fatherland. This move proved highly successful in García's career because after a heated debate, it was widely accepted, celebrated, admired and even adopted by the Argentine population. Esteban Buch, in his study of the National Anthem, *O juremos con gloria morir* (2013) dedicates a whole chapter to the analysis of García's version, which he considers especially subjective and expressive. García himself explains his interpretation of the lyrics of the anthem:

Hay partes de la letra que son muy fuertes y muy teatrales también. Ese "libertad, libertad, libertad" lo podés decir las tres veces de una manera distinta: puede sonar como una protesta o como un pedido y a la vez yo soy eso y eso es libertad. ¿Se entiende? Quiero decir que de las tres libertades, una soy yo. No me excluyan más de las libertades. Soy parte de una generación que es libertad y que se la tiene bien ganada. Así que no me digan cómo hay que cantar el Himno. Yo me gané estar acá: me metían en cana tres veces por semana, por nada. Sé qué es la libertad y sé qué es perderla. Por eso creo que el Himno, a pesar de las polémicas, une más de lo que desune...(BERTI, 1990).

If the symbol as a whole represents the totality of the nation, then each of the components of that nation has to be represented by a part of the symbol. Hence, the national union materializes every time each member vibrates with the part that represents them (BUCH, 2013, p. 225). It is precisely on this point that García's genius is evident: he comprehended a crucial line of this solemn song and performed it in a way that served as a bridge that communicates and joins all Argentines. The

line “*libertad, libertad, libertad*” performed in different ways allows each Argentine to identify with at least one of them and that is when, as García says, the anthem unites people.

García seems to have grasped the essence of the national Argentine being, the dynamics of Argentineness, based on individualism, a history of polarities and divisions and he portrays it in many of his songs –“*todo se construye y se destruyetan rápidamente [...] es parte de la religión*” (“Parte de la religión”, *Parte de la religión*, 1987). Such essence is not only characteristic of the several dictatorship periods and political unrest, in fact it is the result of a long history of oppositions that started with the founding of the nation in the nineteenth century.³García describes Argentineness in these terms:

*Él siente culpa, él vive torturado
 él no es tan inteligente.
 Él nunca avanza, camina de costado,
 él tiene miedo a su mente,
 es parte de la religión.
 (“Parte de la religión”, *Parte de la religión*, 1987)*

In sum, the mythical hero García has his own logo, his own version of the National Anthem and, à la Roman emperors, he even has his own life-sized statue. Indeed, in the touristic city of Mar del Plata, there is a bronze statue in the image of García and Nito Mestre, members of the legendary rock duet Sui Generis. On the photograph published by *Clarín* on 6 February 2013, one can see the city authorities inaugurating the statues beside the two musicians. In that photograph, García appears with his hand covering the front part of his trousers in a suggestive manner. During the opening ceremony, when he was being honored by the city council, he gave a speech in which, among other interesting remarks, he said: “*Soy una estatua. Ahora puedo hacer cualquier cosa [...] ¡Hablen con mi estatua!*”

His mission: The never-ending song

Undoubtedly, García’s heroic mission is to survive his physical death by living eternally through his music. At times, the eternity of his art seems to be recognition of his individuality and his determination to claim his unique talent (“*yoya soy parte del mar*” [“Mientras miro las nuevas olas” Serú Girán, *Bicicleta*, 1980]), at other times it seems to be a complaint (“*podrías entender que vine aquí en una misión: quiero*

³The interested reader can refer to the concept of “civilization vs. barbarism” that was founded by Sarmiento in his book *Facundo*(1845).

curar pero mis manos solo tocan” [“Podrías entender”, *Say no more*, 1996]).⁴ Monteleone explains that García has constructed an image of himself that is situated between the real and the fantastic: “[...] sus composiciones siempre oscilaron entre el individualismo anárquico y el enfrentamiento con lo institucional. Por una parte, ofreció un ademán de la manía y la extravagancia que en su deriva podían rematar en la locura o el suicidio” (MONTELEONE, 2002).

Yet I would argue that the hero overcomes his own death by means of his songs: “*Vivo a través de una ilusión [...] vivo a través de una canción*” (“Casa vacía”, *Say no more*, 1996). According to Colomba, the songwriter has a social competence: he is authorized to speak as someone in power. The simple fact of being an entertainer a songwriter is a way of claiming a space in a loud voice, it is an act of affirmation of his own voice” (COLOMBA, 2011, p. 71). This “authority” is expressed in García’s songs repeatedly. Perhaps one of the most effective songs in which he alludes to his mission and the eternity of his art is the one that says: “*Volveré a abrir tu corazón, aunque pasen mil años te daré mi amor*” (“Transformación”, *Kill Gil*, 2010). This idea of eternity is reinforced in other songs in which his art is described as the never-ending song: “*Esta canción durará por siempre porque yo mismo la hice así*”. (“ChipiChipi”, *La hija de la lágrima*, 1994).

The mission that motivates this hero’s journey is often portrayed as a deep spiritual and artistic need. The hero, while “*sub[e] una escalera, cumpl[e] una misión*” (“ChipiChipi”, *La hija de la lágrima*, 1994), tries to wake up his audience and push them to take off (“No te animás a despegar”, *Piano Bar*, 1984). He sometimes is even involved in dangerous situations, but these seem not always to be understood: “*Mirá pendejo, me tire porvos*” (“Me tire porvos”, Sui Generis, *Sinfonías para adolescentes*, 2000). This song refers to a well-known episode in his life that was covered extensively by the press when García jumped out of the window of his ninth-floor hotel room to the swimming pool without suffering any injuries. When asked what crossed his mind when he decided to perform such a deed, he answered: “*Me tiré del noveno piso para demostrarles que no somos todos iguales*”.

Many times his mission looks like a megalomaniac delirium, self-defined as “*un vicio más*” (“Tuvicio”, *Influencia*, 2002), other times it underscores the difference, the distance, his belonging to a lonely, painful place in another dimension where there is nobody else, and his desperation for some attention: “*Yo sé que soy imban cable, yo sé que te hice reír, yo sé que soy insoportable pero alguien en el*

⁴This idea is then repeated and emphasized in “Deberías saber porqué” (*El Ángel vigía*, 60x60, 2011).

mundo piensa en mí”. (“Alguien en el mundo piensa en mí”, *Say no more*, 1996). In fact, in “Say no more”, the song that is also the title of an album and the SNM cult (SNM defined as a “constant concept” he inaugurates that year), García accuses, “*fallaste, no viste quién soy*” (1996), as if it were essential for his “*aliados*” to truly grasp the essence of their hero. Furthermore, after a time spent away from the public eye recovering from drug and alcohol abuse, García made a triumphant return that was highlighted with a new questioning of his audience:

*Che, si en verdad me tomas en serio
 Deberías saber por qué
 En el fondo no es un misterio
 Deberías saber por qué
 Te vas, ahí nomás
 Todos van hasta ahí nomás
 Ahí nomás.
 Che, si te pones la camiseta
 Deberías saber por qué
 Aunque digas que no me meta
 Deberías saber por qué (Videoclip, 2009).*

It is interesting that, in this song, García once more alludes to symbols of massive popularity such as a football t-shirt as a marker of identity (“*ponerse la camiseta*”). In this case, the t-shirt is a symbol of the communion between the hero and his audience, an attribute that implies a movement in the spectators towards their hero.

An important song in this album is “Transformación” (*Kill Gil*, 2010) which indeed underlines the transformation that the musician would undergo during the following years, when he stepped out of the public sphere and concentrated on his health. In a way, García foreshadows his transformation: “*Hay veces que me siento encerrado, la jaula no es solo esta pared. No insistan en ponerme cerraduras soy libre y no pienso desistir*”. At the same time, this “transformation” alludes to the physical death and decay of the human body and the eternal permanence of art:

*Volveré a abrir tu corazón,
 aunque pasen mil años te daré mi amor.
 Volveré a abrir tu corazón,
 aunque me desintegre la transformación.*

It is important to highlight that García uses the term “*aliados*” (allies) to address his followers, as we mentioned at the start of this article. It should be noted

that the “*aliados*” lifts his fans to a level of complicity with their hero. By being called allies they are called to join the hero in his quest.

The enemy: La grasa de las capitals

The existence of the rock apparatus, according to Grossberg, relies “precisely in its production of itself as an effective alliance which locates the sites of empowerment between the music and its fans” (1984, p. 240). García knows these dynamics quite well and he also knows how his Argentine audience thinks and acts. Throughout his career he has managed to build an intimate relationship with his audience and a throne for himself, only to laugh at, and make a parody of, that same throne he occupies. The construction of the myth, of the hero called Charly García, is an allegory that points to that perverse system that invents popular idols and uses them at its discretion: “*nadie vende diarios por amor*” (Transformación, *Kill Gil*, 2010). Before the system utilizes him, García does so himself. If it is an unavoidable process, he would rather to be in control of it. He proclaims himself a popular hero so that he can manage his popularity at his own discretion: “*Estoy pensando en crear un impuesto a Charly García, ¿quéquieren, que circule por ahí gratis?*” (SANCHEZ, 2013).

Therefore, right from the very early stages of his career, García pointed to the media as major contributors to the celebrity phenomenon. Many of his songs criticize the Hollywood stardom system that was being installed in Argentina. His relationship with the press was highly conflictive during his first years of fame,⁵ but soon he learned how to exploit the press and use it to his benefit. When attacked by the press both as a musician and as an individual because of the excesses in his private life, instead of reacting with discomfort as he had in the beginning, García started to use that public space and attention to revert the situation and use it as a platform for self-promotion: “*Ya me cansé: que acepten que soy fabuloso o que se vayan a la c... de su madre. Sé lo que estoy haciendo...*” (CICCIOLI, 2010, p. 30). *La grasa de las capitals* (1979), for instance, is an album that parodies the media and at the same time is a way to respond to the unfriendliness of the press towards his performances.

Despite the prohibition of the broadcasting of music sung in English in 1982

⁵In the 1970s, his band “La máquina de hacer pájaros” was severely criticized by the press. Newspaper *La Opinión* published an article stating the band members were perverts and hermaphrodites (CHIROM, 1983, p. 84). Another very well known story in Argentina is that of the journalist Patricia Perea, who was working in Cordoba for the magazine *Expreso Imaginario*. Because of her painful remarks about García’s band Serú Girán, Charly replied by dedicating to her a song called “Peperina”, which would also give the name to one of the band’s albums.

because of the Malvinas/Falkland war (the military dictatorship officials considered English to be “the language of the enemy”), García included clear references to what, for him, was the best of Anglo culture: the BBC, The Clash and whisky. Once the dictatorship (and the war) were over, he started to include covers of American and British musicians. Just as with the phrase of the national anthem (“libertad, libertad, libertad”), García seems to be creating, here, a bridge in an effort to unify: these songs join cultures from countries that were once at war by means of the common language of rock. García seems to create an alternative third space in which languages and nationalities do not matter, and where the main shared culture is music. After both war and dictatorship are over, this idea of his music as a free space remains in his songs. Indeed, the idyllic space created by this hero is free from temporal markers and worldly structures: “*Yo vengo de otra guerra, de otro sol. Bajo alrededor y por donde yo voy y de donde yo soy no hay tiempo*” (“Love is love”, *La hija de la lágrima*, 1994). Furthermore, “No importa”, the first song of his album *Kill Gil* (2010), describes the world as a prison:

*Estamos juntos en la prisión
 No hay forma de salir
 El mundo es un patio de prisión
 ¿A dónde querés ir?*

The “*patio de prisión*” that he mentions unites everybody by functioning as a big trap or cage. To be able to escape that prison, his music provides an alternative.

His teachings: Filosofía barata y zapatos de goma

A quick look at the many blogs and social network websites that are dedicated to García immediately shows that many phrases have been taken from his songs and are re-used in different contexts. Many of these phrases have become part of Argentines’ everyday language and it is not unusual to see headlines that use those phrases without any reference to García, which points to an assumption that such references need no real clarification.⁶

⁶ Some examples of these headlines are: “Demoliendo Buenos Aires” (from “Demoliendo hoteles” (*Piano Bar*, 1984), an opinion piece by Pablo Sirvén in *La Nación*, 26/02/11 <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1353145-demoliendo-buenos-aires>; “Filosofía barata y zapatos de moda” (from *Filosofía barata y zapatos de goma*, 1990) by Natalie Schejtman in “Radar” a supplement in newspaper *Página 12*, 15/06/08 <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/radar/9-4664-2008-06-15.html>; and “El más cuerdo es el más delirante” from “Raros peinados nuevos” (*Piano Bar*, 1984) by Fernando Bogado, also in “Radar”, *Página 12*, 22/12/13 <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/libros/10-5204-2013-12-22.html>

His album *Demasiado ego* comes with a booklet that contains many of these phrases he uses as his maxims. In fact, these principles or teachings have been recorded in three different songs called *Veintetrajés de lágrimas I*, *Veintetrajés de lágrimas II* and *Veintetrajés de lágrimas III*, all included in his work *60x60* (2012). These phrases, taken from the lines of his songs over several decades of musical production, have indeed travelled beyond the musical domain to inhabit the broader culture and language of the Argentines. One of García's most recent songs to describe the process explored in this article is the already mentioned "Transformación", in which he talks about his uniqueness, his freedom, his eternity, the press and his commitment to healing through his music:

*No insistan en ponerme cerraduras
 soy libre y no pienso desistir
 cuando quiero salir, no me importa morir
 ¡no tengo fin!
 ¡no tengo fin!
 Cada vez que trates de matar
 quizás estés matando a quien te trata bien
 cada vez que quieras disfrazar
 todos esos disfraces abrirán tu piel.
 Y cuando estés cansado de sangrar
 Verás que ya no hay nada que ganar
 cada vez que trates de ganar
 será que tenés mucho que perder.
 Y cada vez que el canillita trae noticias del final
 parece asegurar que sólo por amor
 nadie vende diarios (jamás)
 Y cada vez que pedimos perdón teniendo la razón
 por descomposición tratando de agradar
 nos hacemos daño
 No insistan en ponerme cerraduras
 soy libre y no pienso desistir
 cuando quiero salir, no me importa morir no tengo fin!
 no tengo fin!
 Volveré a abrir tu corazón
 aunque pasen mil años te daré mi amor
 volveré a abrir tu corazón
 aunque me desintegre la transformación.
 Y cuando estés cansado de llorar
 ese vacío ya no te hará mal
 Volveré a abrir tu corazón.
 (Kill Gil, 2010)*

"Transformación" seems to point to the system that invents and promotes stardom for purely commercial purposes ("nadie vende diarios por amor") and it clearly states his eternity via his music ("no tengo fin, volveré [...] aunque me

desintegre la transformación”). Transformation is the name given to death. By means of his music as an eternal song, García will defeat death and simply transform.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, rock stars have often been turned into commercial products. Once representatives of counterculture and resistance movements, at a later stage many rock musicians were more often than not absorbed into the system as profitable products. García managed to subvert this process and put it to new ends: he created a parody of the rock star by using his own stardom and popularity as fodder. Indeed, García seems to have identified and put to subversive use the mechanisms by which popular heroes are created. He has a logo, a clear enemy, a mission and a set of principles that function as signs on which to rest his heroism. By controlling his popularity and stardom, García seems to have achieved control over the construction of himself as a hero, to the point that he has also become aware of, and in his lyrics reflected upon, the possibility of achieving immortality through his music: “*Vivo a través de una ilusión [...] vivo a través de una canción*” (*Casa vacía*, 1996).

References

- AA.VV. *Grandes entrevistas de Rolling Stone. Íconos del rock nacional*. Buenos Aires: Publirevistas, 2006. Reproduced in COLOMBA, D. *Letras de rock argentino...*, p. 107.
- BERTI, Eduardo. “El Himno para todo público”, *Página 12* (28 May 1990).
- BUCH, Esteban. *O juremos con gloria morir. Una historia del Himno Nacional Argentino, de la Asamblea del Año XIII a Charly García*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2013.
- CICCIOLI, Martín. *Rockeado*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2010.
- CHIROM, Daniel. *Charly García*. Buenos Aires: El Juglar, 1983.
- CLARIN, “Charly García y Nito Mestre ya son de bronce”, sección Sociedad (5 Oct. 2013). Disponível em: http://www.clarin.com/sociedad/Sui_Generis-estatuas_de_bronce-homenaje-Mar_Del_Plata-Charly_Garcia-Nito_Mestre_0_860314173.html.
- COLOMBA, Diego. *Letras de rock argentino. Género, estilos y transposiciones (1965-2008)*. Berlín: Editorial Académica Española, 2011.
- FAVORETTO, Mara. *Charly en el país de las alegorías. Un viaje por las letras de Charly García*. Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2014.
- FRITH, Simon. *Sound Effects*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.
- GARCÍA, Charly. *Piano Bar*. DG Discos. Interdisc. Universal Music, 1984.1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Parte de la religión*. Sony BMG, 1987. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Filosofía barata y zapatos de goma*. Sony BMG, 1990. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *La hija de la lágrima*. Sony BMG, 1994.1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Say no more*. Sony BMG, 1996.1 CD: digital, stereo.

- _____. *El aguante*. Sony BMG, 1998. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Demasiado ego*. Universal Music, 1999. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *El aguante*. Sony BMG, 1998. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Influencia*. EMI, 2002. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Kill gil*. Sony Music. Del Angel, FEG Discos, 2010. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Líneas paralelas*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2013. 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- GARCIA, Charly & The Prostitution. “Detrás de las paredes”, “Say no more” and “El Ángle vigía” 3 CD: digital, stereo, and 3 DVD Laser stereo. Box *60x60*. EMI Music, DSX Films, 2012..
- GROSSBERG, Lawrence. “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life”, *Popular Music*, Vol. 4 (1984), p. 225-258.
- LEWIS, George. “The Meaning’s in the Music”. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 3:133-141.
- MONTELEONE, Jorge. “Figuras de la pasión rocker. Ensayo sobre rock argentino.” *Everba* (Summer, 2002).
 [http://everba.eter.org/summer02/figuras_jorge.htm].
- PUJOL, Sergio. *Rock y dictadura*. Buenos Aires: Booket, 2007.
- SANCHEZ, Nora. “García Y2K”, *Clarín*, sección Espectáculos, 11-I-2000. Web. Acceso 17-IX-2013. <http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2000/01/11/c-00401d.htm>
- SEBRELI, Juan José. *Comediantes y mártires. Ensayo contra los mitos* (Buenos Aires: Debate, 2008).
- GIRÁN, Serú. *Serú Girán* (Music Hall, 1978). 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *La grasa de las capitales* (Music Hall, 1979). 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- _____. *Peperina* (SG Discos. Interdisc. Universal Music, 1981). 1 CD: digital, stereo.
- TYLOR, Edward Burnett. “Wild Men and Beast-children”, *Anthropological Review*, Vol. 1 (1863), p. 21-32.
- VERBITSKY, Horacio. *El vuelo*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995.