

# Reconstructing the Event: Spectres of terror in Chilean Performance

RICHARD ELLIOTT

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE<sup>1</sup>

On March 31 1990, in the early days of the newly restored democracy in Chile, the Cuban *cantautor* (singer-songwriter) Silvio Rodríguez staged a concert in the Chilean capital's National Stadium in front of an audience of 80,000 people. Accompanying him were the fourteen-piece band Irakere, led by the Cuban jazz pianist Chucho Valdés, and the formerly exiled Chilean folksinger Isabel Parra and her group. After a rousing introduction featuring Valdés's 'Concierto Andino', Rodríguez delivered a set of songs that drew on his extensive song catalogue from the 1970s and 1980s, including particular audience favourites 'Pequeña serenata diurna', 'La maza', 'Unicornio' and, topically, 'Santiago de Chile'. The concert was recorded and released the following year as *Silvio Rodríguez en Chile* and was televised and broadcast in many Latin American countries. Shortly after the release of the live album, the label Luaka Bop, run by Yale Evelev and David Byrne, released, as the first volume of a series entitled *Cuba Classics*, a compilation of songs by Rodríguez. *Cuba Classics 1: Silvio Rodríguez Greatest Hits* is claimed to be the first Cuban disc released in the United States since the start of the embargo placed on Cuban goods in 1962, and sold over 400,000 copies (mostly in Spain and Latin America).

I wish to locate Rodríguez's Santiago concert as an important site of memory in the cultural landscape of Chile and to suggest that it can shed light on the relationships between music, loss, mourning and remembrance, and on the ways that performative events allow these relationships to emerge. At the same time I wish to problematise the notion of the performative event by alluding to Jacques Derrida's concept of the event as expressed in *Specters of Marx*.<sup>2</sup> Rodríguez's concert was an event in the sense that we often use the word. But it also takes part in what we can think of, following Derrida, as the creation of a bigger event. This event is not reducible to something that happened over the course of a few hours on a particular night in Santiago, but rather can be seen as a much larger and longer process, which takes into account the recent history of Chile – a history dominated by the violence and repression of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1989) – as well as the (recent) history of Latin America more generally.<sup>3</sup> Part of what I mean can be conveyed by unpacking some extra information from the brief sketch of the concert already given.

1. Silvio Rodríguez (1946–). Firstly, there is the figure of the performer

himself. As a singer-songwriter, poet, composer and political activist, Silvio Rodríguez has been at the forefront of the “movement” that came to be known as *nueva trova*.<sup>4</sup> The sense of there being a “movement” is one that, much like the concept of the “event” to be discussed here, was applied *post facto* to a group of performers (Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola and others) who emerged in the late 1960s and were retroactively perceived to be renovating the Cuban *trova* song form, a renovation necessary due to the “corruption” of popular music by the hegemony and unwanted influence of Anglo-American popular music forms (a “fact” made ever more explicit following the Cuban Revolution). As with most *post facto* “manifestos”, the truth was somewhat different; Rodríguez, for one, has always claimed as much influence from the Beatles and Bob Dylan as from orthodox “new song” pioneers such as Chico Buarque and Violeta Parra.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, however, and with clear tactical aims, *nueva trova* became associated with other *nueva canción* movements that were emerging contemporaneously in other Latin American countries and in Spain. Rodríguez’s music, a potent mixture of explicit political statements and more coded, densely metaphorical pieces, found a receptive audience throughout the Hispanic and Lusophone worlds and, in often brutal times – such as during the military dictatorships which gripped Argentina and Chile during the 1970s – offered messages of hope and remembrance to the victims of oppressive regimes.<sup>6</sup> Rodríguez had visited Chile, where his music was to become enormously popular, prior to the 1973 coup that brought General Augusto Pinochet to power, and had maintained close links with the *nueva canción* musicians then and subsequently; his return in 1990 signified, as much as anything in the early days of postdictatorship, a return to the promise of the Allende years (1970–73) and an end to the official silencing of his and others’ music during the intervening period.

2. Recording the concert. As stated by Rodríguez in the liner notes to *En Chile*, the idea of recording the concert came from Ricardo Garcia, the founder of the Chilean record label Alerce. The album is also dedicated to Garcia, who died shortly after producing it. As a primary force behind the music known as *canto nuevo*, Ricardo Garcia had an enormous influence on the direction of Chilean popular music during the Pinochet dictatorship, when state censorship and oppression sought to silence the voices of disquiet within the country.<sup>7</sup> Garcia’s participation in this particular project reminds us of the crucial role he played in encouraging the possibility of a “messianic” moment in authoritarian Chile, whereby the possibility of hope might find a space to emerge at unexpected moments.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the very fact of having this historic concert recorded tempts us to ask questions regarding the recording process itself, in particular its role as a potential (though never entirely successful) “loss prevention” mechanism. Does the recording of concerts ever truly capture the moment in any effective way? Even assuming that a recording “fixes” a moment, provides a site that will remain identical for its duration, how can we ever claim to be the same, or our memories reliable, when we return to that site (to listen, to pay homage to that original moment)?
3. The Parras. The participation of Isabel Parra in the concert allows us to

tease out more historical connections; as with Ricardo Garcia we can ask: what does the participation of Isabel Parra in a concert in Chile's National Stadium in 1990 signify beyond the merely denotative? What does Isabel Parra connote? The answers, involving her family (the folksinger, and "mother of Chilean *nueva canción*", Violeta Parra, the poet Nicanor Parra and the singer Angel Parra among them) along with her own career and exile, provide us with much information about the role of popular music in Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century.

4. Víctor Jara (1932–73). At a certain point Rodríguez dedicates the concert to the memory of the murdered Chilean *cantautor* Víctor Jara. Jara, as writer, performer, theatre director and political activist, had been one of the voices most closely associated with the campaign that brought Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular party to power in the 1970 Chilean elections. One does not have to read much material on Latin American popular music before coming across references to Jara's role in the *nueva canción* movement, his arrest and subsequent murder by the Chilean forces following the military coup of 11 September 1973 that overthrew the Allende government, and his posthumous Che Guevara-like career as an icon on posters, T-shirts and murals.<sup>9</sup> However, unsurprising as Rodríguez's dedication might be, it is worth once again exploring beyond the obviously denotative (as indeed it is with Che). What are the layers of meaning exposed by dedicating a concert at this particular time and place to Jara, or by recording, as Rodríguez was to do later on the *Tributo a Víctor Jara* album, Jara's song of loss and reminiscence, 'Te recuerdo Amanda'?

These facts and questions, however, merely provide us with evidence to consider the "event" as perhaps larger than that initially imagined when confronted with the bare facts of a single concert that happened to take place during one evening in one city. What I wish to add to this is a second suggestion of Derrida's: namely that we should not fall into the comfortable position of positing an event as either an origin or a *telos*. The concert under scrutiny is not a culmination of any, let alone all, of the mini-histories mentioned above. None of the associations and connections we can draw out of any account of the concert or its participants can be said to constitute a reason for the concert, neither is the concert the inevitable result of or response to a set of prior events. What the concert in fact does is to create this larger event, or what we might initially prefer to think of as 'the event-ness of the event'.<sup>10</sup> This then has implications for the way we think of performance. Asking what the role of this particular performance might be encourages us to examine more general issues surrounding performance. How do performative events contribute to the working through of private and public memories, particularly those associated with periods of trauma. What is the public dimension of mourning? Can we see performative musical events such as the stadium concert as ritualistic processes analogous to other ritualistic events (sacred or non sacred)? How does the attempt to fix the ritual process, via recording technology, add to the possibilities of memory and mourning work? These questions are prompted here by a consideration of a performance event in a country where, as Jan Fairley points out, the stadium concert has become a favoured site for the making public of private traumas.<sup>11</sup> Yet they have resonance for all

performance events, whether or not those events actively seek to exorcise spectres or open up a space for hope.

## Death and Disappearance

Before returning to these issues of performance, I wish to examine a pair of songs closely associated with *nueva trova/nueva canción*, Víctor Jara's 'Te recuerdo Amanda' and Silvio Rodríguez's 'Unicornio'. Both songs provide good examples of works that bring together the themes I am exploring here (performance, the creation of the event, mourning and memorialisation, exorcism or conjuration) in that both have been kept alive through repeated performance (live and recorded) and deal in their own ways with notions of death and disappearance.

'Te recuerdo Amanda' appeared on Jara's album *Pongo en tus manos abiertas* (1969) and proved to be a concert favourite for the rest of the singer's life. The song reappeared on the posthumous collection *Manifiesto* (1974) with an English translation read by Jara's widow Joan. This album was produced and released in Britain, where Joan had fled with her and Víctor's children following the coup and Víctor's murder. The song went on to have a busy afterlife, being covered by numerous artists, including Quilapayún (1976), Robert Wyatt (1984) and Silvio Rodríguez (1998). As with its ghostly appearance on *Manifiesto*, where Víctor's voice seems to haunt Joan's reading, the song became a spectral accompaniment to the many performances of opposition to the Chilean dictatorship. Quilapayún featured it in their concert programme as they toured the world, Joan Baez performed it during her concert in Chile in 1981, and Patricio Manns included the song in a concert in Santiago in 1990 that marked both his country's return to democracy and Manns's return from exile.

Silvio Rodríguez's 'Unicornio' appeared on an album of the same title in 1982, bearing a dedication to Roque Dalton, the Salvadoran poet and political theorist assassinated in 1975. Like 'Te Recuerdo Amanda', 'Unicornio' became a live favourite, whether performed with guitar accompaniment (as can be heard on the live album *Silvio Rodríguez y Pablo Milanés en vivo en Argentina*) or with piano (as in the Chilean version). The importance granted the song in Rodríguez's live repertoire can be gleaned from watching the 1990 concert in Santiago, when the song was played as an encore featuring an ornate piano introduction by Chucho Valdés, and the participation of the crowd in the song's evocative "se fue" refrain. In addition to numerous performances by Rodríguez, 'Unicornio' has been performed in concert and/or recorded by a number of international artists, including Mercedes Sosa (1983), Mísia (who recorded fado versions of the song in Portuguese and Spanish in 1993), Lucetita Benitez (2000) and Joan Isaac (a version in Catalan, performed as a duet with Silvio Rodríguez in 2002).<sup>12</sup>

A translation of the lyrics to the two songs is given here, followed by a reading of them in relation to the themes of death and disappearance:

'Te recuerdo Amanda'  
Words & Music: Víctor Jara<sup>13</sup>

Te recuerdo,  
Amanda,  
la calle mojada,  
corriendo a la  
fábrica  
donde trabajaba  
Manuel.  
La sonrisa ancha,  
la lluvia en el pelo,  
no importaba nada,  
ibas a encontrarte  
con él,  
con él, con él,  
con él, con él.  
Son cinco minutos,  
la vida es eterna  
en cinco minutos.  
Suenan la sirena  
de vuelta al trabajo,  
y tú caminando,  
lo iluminas todo.  
Los cinco minutos  
te hacen florecer.  
Te recuerdo,  
Amanda,  
la calle mojada,  
corriendo a la  
fábrica  
donde trabajaba  
Manuel.  
La sonrisa ancha,  
la lluvia en el pelo,  
no importaba nada,  
ibas a encontrarte  
con él,  
con él, con él,  
con él, con él,  
que partió a la  
sierra,  
que nunca hizo  
daño,  
que partió a la  
sierra  
y en cinco minutos  
quedó destrozado.  
Suenan la sirena  
de vuelta al trabajo.  
Muchos no  
volvieron.  
Tampoco Manuel.

I remember you  
Amanda  
when the streets  
were wet,  
running to the  
factory  
where Manuel was  
working.  
With your wide  
smile  
and the rain in your  
hair,  
nothing else  
mattered:  
you were going to  
meet him.  
  
Five minutes only,  
all of your life  
in five minutes.  
The siren is  
sounding.  
Time to go back to  
work.  
And, as you walk,  
you light up  
everything.  
Those five minutes  
have made you  
flower.  
I remember you  
Amanda  
when the streets  
were wet,  
running to the  
factory  
where Manuel was  
working.  
With your wide  
smile  
and the rain in your  
hair,  
nothing else  
mattered:  
you were going to  
meet him.  
  
And he took to the

Te recuerdo,  
Amanda,  
la calle mojada  
corriendo a la  
fábrica  
donde trabajaba  
Manuel.

mountains to fight.  
He had never hurt a  
fly  
but he took to the  
mountains  
and in five minutes  
it was all wiped out.  
The siren is  
sounding.  
Time to go back to  
work.  
Many will not go  
back.  
One of them is  
Manuel.  
I remember you  
Amanda  
when the streets  
were wet,  
running to the  
factory  
where Manuel was  
working.

‘Unicornio’  
Words & Music: Silvio Rodríguez<sup>14</sup>

Mi unicornio azul  
ayer se me perdió:  
pastando lo dejé  
y desapareció.  
Cualquier  
información  
bien la voy a pagar:  
las flores que dejó  
no me han querido  
hablar.  
Mi unicornio azul  
ayer se me perdió.  
No sé si se me fue,  
no sé si se extravió,  
y yo no tengo más  
que un unicornio  
azul.  
Si alguien sabe de él  
le ruego  
información:  
cien mil o un millón  
yo pagaré.  
Mi unicornio azul

Yesterday,  
I lost my blue  
unicorn.  
I left him grazing in  
the fields  
and he disappeared.  
I'll pay handsomely  
for any lead.  
The flowers he left  
behind  
will not tell me a  
thing.  
Yesterday,  
I lost my blue  
unicorn.  
I don't know if he  
ran away,  
I don't know if he  
went astray.  
And I have  
but one blue  
unicorn.  
If anyone knows

se me ha perdido	where he is
ayer,	I beg you to tell me.
se fue.	I'll pay
Mi unicornio y yo	a hundred
hicimos amistad	thousand, a million.
– un poco con	For I lost my blue
amor,	unicorn
un poco con verdad	yesterday.
–	Now he's gone.
Con su cuerno de	My unicorn and I
añil	became friends,
pescaba una	partly through love,
canción.	partly through
Saberla compartir	honesty.
era su vocación.	With his indigo horn
Mi unicornio azul	he'd catch a song;
ayer se me perdió,	knowing how to
y puede parecer	share it
acaso una obsesión.	was his greatest joy.
Pero no tengo más	Yesterday,
que un unicornio	I lost my blue
azul	unicorn.
y aunque tuviera	It may seem
dos,	like an obsession,
yo sólo quiero	yet I have
aquel.	but one blue
Cualquier	unicorn.
información	And even if I had
la pagaré.	two,
Mi unicornio azul	he's the one I love.
se me ha perdido	I'll pay handsomely
ayer,	for any lead.
se fue.	I lost my blue
	unicorn
	yesterday.
	Now he's gone.

By introducing the topics of death and disappearance I wish to draw a distinction between the idea of a fixed state (death) and an unknown and unknowable outcome (disappearance). We might also map these notions onto those of presence (death) and absence (disappearance). The Spanish writer Julio Llamazares provides an eloquent comparison of the two terms in the following passage from his novel *Yellow Rain*:

When doubt constantly feeds desire and stores up hopes for what can never be, it is very hard to wipe from the memory all traces of the past. Death at least has tangible images: the grave, the words spoken over it, the flowers that refresh the face of memory and, above all, that absolute awareness of the irreversibility of death that makes itself at home in time and

makes of absence just another familiar habit. Disappearance, however, has no limits; it is the contrary of a fixed state.<sup>15</sup>

Or, as Derrida puts it in *Specters of Marx*:

Hamlet does not ask merely to whom the skull belonged [...]. He demands to know to whom the grave belongs (“Whose grave's this, sir?”). Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where – and *it is necessary* (to know – to make certain) that, in what remains of him, *he remains there*. Let him stay there and move no more!<sup>16</sup>

Derrida's mention of mourning may well remind us of the distinction drawn by Freud between mourning and melancholy, whereby the former represents a working-through of grief and hence a “healthy” ritual for reincorporating oneself into “normal” life (Derrida speaks of mourning as ‘work’: ‘not one kind of work among others’ but ‘work itself’<sup>17</sup>), and the latter represents an inability to come to terms with the lost object and hence a weakness on the part of the melancholic, who can never fully (re)adjust to “normality”.<sup>18</sup> I would stress here that, in relating these concepts to the deaths and disappearances that resulted through the regimes of terror enacted by the military dictatorships in Latin America, I do not mean to suggest a weakness of character on the part of those affected by the loss of loved ones (or by the loss of freedom), but rather an enforced weakness that might better be thought of as a helplessness in the face of brute, authoritarian terror. More specifically, neither of the songs detailed here can be said to be *about* the dictatorship as such; Jara's song predates it and Rodríguez's decidedly ambiguous narrative pertains to be, if anything, about the loss of some dreamlike or mythical beast. Yet certain factors allow the songs to be read in ways that shed light on the role of music in traumatic and post-traumatic times.

‘Te recuerdo Amanda’, focussing as it does on the relationship between two working class Chileans and the rupture of that relationship in some unwanted conflict, makes implicit reference to the history of conflicts that had shaped life for many generations in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America. Though we most often hear of Pinochet, it is important to remember that Chile had been under direct or indirect military rule at various points throughout the twentieth century. As poets such as Pablo Neruda had sought to express the experience of the common man in such times of conflict, so Jara evokes the fate of another trapped between the slavery of the factory and the battle ground. ‘Unicornio’, on the other hand, notably stands apart from numerous more explicit songs by Rodríguez, songs that often concern particular national and international conflicts or engage with specific examples of injustice. By a strange reversal, it is as if ‘Unicornio’s very lack of explicit context is what makes it such a useful and evocative song to summon up the reality of the dirty wars in Argentina and Chile, where disappearance and ambiguity became such a part of everyday life. Like the metaphorical allusions of post-coup *canto nuevo* in Chile, the poetics of what can not be said (or sung) come to say more and mean more to those experiencing the trauma of disappeared friends and family. Rodríguez famously refuses to explain the song or say what or who the blue unicorn represents but



many Chileans made the decision themselves, substituting their loss for that bemoaned by the song's narrator.<sup>19</sup>

The music of 'Unicornio' echoes this ambiguity. The second and fourth verses conclude with the refrain 'se fue', the second of which is then held over the space of three bars as the melody used at the introduction takes over. There is no resolution; 'se fue' – and the musical figure it engenders – does not signal an end, an image, but rather the beginning of a whole new cyclical return to the root of the trauma, to the fact of disappearance. This musical device reflects what Llamazares calls 'the contrary of a fixed state'. 'Te recuerdo Amanda', in staging death in battle, allows for the limits and irreversibility of death that Llamazares speaks of. This finality is echoed in the musical arrangement. Although, like 'Unicornio', two of the verses contain a two syllable motif (in this case 'con él') that seems, through its repetition, as if it could take the melody to a position of ambiguity, in fact the musical project here is to let the motif act as both emotional emphasis of 'él' and as bridging device to a section that in both cases signals a conclusion. In the first case this conclusion maps onto the return to work signalled by the siren; in the second the fact that Manuel will not be returning. His ending and the ending of the song are unambiguous. At the same time, the repeat of the first four lines may suggest an attempt to bring him back to life. These lines also serve to remind us that this is a song about the memory of someone (the singer) for Amanda. Her fate is rather more ambiguous than Manuel's.

'Te recuerdo Amanda', as a song strongly identified with Víctor Jara (probably his best known), has come to stand in also for the finality of the singer's death, becoming a kind of aural gravestone. Its use on the British *Manifiesto* album in 1974; its status as *the* song to cover by other performers who wish to evoke Jara's memory; the allusion to the song in the title of a book of memories of Jara published on the thirtieth anniversary of the coup and of Jara's murder; its inclusion in the programme of 'fundamental songs' performed by Quilapayún in a series of concerts to mark that same anniversary: all these uses of 'Te Recuerdo Amanda' signal the role it has taken on as historical and emotional marker in the years since Jara's murder.<sup>20</sup> To sing the song at any point since Jara's death is to partake in what Derrida calls 'the singular spectrality of [a] performative utterance'.<sup>21</sup> 'Unicornio', meanwhile, has become the song that mourns those less famous; in its ambiguity it speaks to and for the thousands of disappeared. As Jara wrote, 'muchos no volvieron'; many did not return and for many more therefore there could (and can) be no finality.

## Performance as the creation of an event

I return to my point of departure, a concert that took place on one particular night in one particular city, one of no doubt thousands of performances taking place at the same time. This, in our conventional use of the word, can be made into a signifying *event* by underlining, as I did earlier, a number of other events that contribute to its significance. In this way we are able to *create* events by creating their event-ness; Derrida's deconstruction of the notion of the event is to highlight exactly this created (constructed) aspect, to show how institutions such as governments, the media, language itself, help to focus our attention on certain events at the exclusion of others. These other events that are ignored

tend to be ongoing events that are not reducible to a particular time or place, events such as inequality, homelessness, poverty, or, in our case, terror. Here, then, I wish to go beyond my (albeit partial) reconstruction of a particular concert and my reading of two songs – whereby I take part in my own creation of these performative events *qua* events – and point to the ways in which these events themselves partake of a creation of a larger event, namely an attempt to counteract the terror and oppression of the “event” of authoritarianism. This counteraction can also be seen as the ‘conjuration’ that Derrida relates to, among other acts, an ‘exorcism’ undertaken by the forces of neo-liberalism against the spectre of Marxism.<sup>22</sup> The performative events described in this article relate to the exorcising of the spectre of right-wing terror, however, in a similar manner to that described in Ariel Dorfman’s book on the Pinochet trial, *Exorcising Terror*. Near the start of his text Dorfman describes a ‘communal act of mourning’ that preceded the inaugural speech of the first post-Pinochet president, Patricio Aylwin, in the National Stadium of Santiago:

Seventy thousand men and women suddenly hushed as they heard a solitary pianist playing, down on the green field, variations on a song by Víctor Jara [...]. As the melody died, a group of women in black skirts and white blouses emerged, carrying placards with photos of their *desaparecidos*. And then one of the women – a wife, a daughter, a mother? – began to dance a *cueca*, our national dance, dancing all her immense solitude because she was dancing a dance meant for a couple. There was a moment of shocked silence followed by the sound of people, slowly, tentatively, starting to clap along with the music, a savage, tender beating of palms that said to the nearby watching mountains that we were sharing that sorrow, that we were also dancing with all our missing loves of history, all our dead, and that we were bringing them back somehow from the invisibility to which Pinochet had banished them. And as if answering us from beyond time, the Symphony Orchestra of Chile burst out with the chorale from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the song adopted by the Chilean resistance in its street battles, Schiller's Ode to Joy, his prophecy of a day “when all men will once again be brothers”.<sup>23</sup>

In this ‘communal act of mourning’ that Dorfman narrates, we can perhaps see the recognition on the part of the organisers of the event and the participants (performers and audience) of what Walter Benjamin called ‘Messianic time’, a sense of the unforeseen possibilities of the here-and-now.<sup>24</sup> This formulation, adapted by Derrida in his account of the unpredictability of the event in *Specters of Marx*, is described by Fredric Jameson as ‘the notion of the non-announced, the turning of a corner in which an altogether different present happens, which was not foreseen’.<sup>25</sup> The issues this raises for performance, then, relate to what we might term a *performative responsibility* in which the repetitive (ritualistic) elements of performance contribute to the responsibility to mourn those from whom we have inherited the presence of the here-and-now, to attempt to do them *justice*. In a related way, performance enacts the creation of an event that is simultaneously a site of mourning and an avowal of the potential of ‘Messianic time’, while also

positioning us, in Dorfman's words, 'beyond time'. Meanwhile technology, particularly recording technology, intervenes in and contributes to the work of mourning by providing the appearance of permanent memory sites, seemingly (reassuringly) fixed and grounded aural monuments that we can revisit at crucial moments. We can never be sure that we will be as fixed and grounded on our return, that our memories will remain faithful to the original event or that we will ever hear the same recording in the same way twice, yet the permanence of the recording maintains a fidelity that, for the most part, we are willing to believe in. Technology enables our mourning work to be both intensely private – at the level, say, of the personal stereo – and equally intensely public – the stadium PA system. Whichever way it operates, it provides material, as does the individual song or the stadium concert, for the reconstruction of a much larger event than might at first be imagined. It is therefore quite possible to enquire of performance how it partakes of an ethics that goes far beyond fidelity to a particular musical prescription (score, hit song, tradition) and applies itself to a position in the battle of memories that we call history.

## FOOTNOTES

1 This article is drawn from a chapter on music, memory and mourning in Chile to be included in my PhD thesis. A portion of the article was presented as a paper entitled “Muchos no volvieron”: Death and Disappearance in Two Latin American Songs” at the Royal Musical Association Annual Research Students’ Conference, University of Leeds, 4–7 Jan 2006. [Back](#)

2 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, tr. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) [Back](#)

3 For an account of the recent history of the Pinochet dictatorship, see Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile under Pinochet* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1991). [Back](#)

4 As the three terms *nueva trova*, *nueva canción* and *canto nuevo* are all to appear in this article, it is worthwhile offering a brief outline of the similarities and differences in these music genres:

Firstly, *nueva canción* refers to the “new song” movements that arose in Latin America and Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, normally identified by a commitment to indigenous themes and often to indigenous instruments. The beginnings of the movement in Latin America are normally associated with the Chilean Violeta Parra (1917–67) and the Argentinean Atahualpa Yupanqui (Héctor Roberto Chavero, 1908–92), both of whom were song collectors, singer-songwriters and guitarists involved with recording and re-presenting the folk songs of their respective countries. The term is also applied to the various singer-songwriters and groups who were inspired by them and other folklorists: these include Víctor Jara, Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún, Patricio Manns (Chile); Mercedes Sosa (Argentina); Chico Buarque (Brazil); Daniel Viglietti (Uruguay); Joan Manuel Serrat, Joan Isaac (Catalunya).

Secondly, *nueva trova*, while being included in the new song movement, refers specifically to the music of Cuba and to the *trova* singer-songwriter tradition of that island. The protagonists of this “movement” (see main text) were seen as rescuing Cuban music from the US-dominated show tunes of the Batista era and returning *trova* to its rightful place. This musical revolution was often tied to the aims of the Cuban Revolution itself, although it was often critical of the regime.

Finally, *canto nuevo*, though used as a term referring to “new song” and undistinguished from *nueva canción* in most of Latin America, has a specific meaning in the case of Chile, referring to music made after the military coup of 1973. At this point *nueva canción* becomes the music associated with those groups exiled from Chile (Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún, Illapu) while *canto nuevo* becomes the music of opposition within the country. Another important distinction to make is that, while all three music genres are seen as oppositional and very much interested in the voice of the people, many of the *nueva canción* groups enacted their opposition as much through the playing of indigenous (Andean) instruments, the use of which was banned in Chile following the coup, as in the lyrics of their songs.

See: Rina Benmayor, ‘La “*nueva trova*”: New Cuban Song’, *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana* ii/1 (Spring–Summer, 1981), pp. 11–44; Robin Moore, ‘Transformations in Cuban *Nueva Trova*, 1965–95’, *Ethnomusicology* xlvii/1 (Winter 2003), pp. 1–41; Jan Fairley, ‘Annotated Bibliography of Latin-American Popular Music with Particular Reference to Chile and to *Nueva Canción*’, *Popular Music* 5 Continuity and Change (1985), pp. 305–56; Albrecht Moreno, ‘Violeta Parra and “La Nueva Canción Chilena”’, *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 5 (1986), pp. 108–125; Nancy Morris, “Canto porque es necesario cantar”: The New Song Movement in Chile’, *Latin American Research Review* xxi/2 (1986), pp. 111–136. [Back](#)

5 This is not to deny the political import of what came to be (and continues to be in its present forms) known as *nueva trova*, but merely to allude to a discourse of the *event*, which sees the latter not as something that merely happened, in the “past simple” sense of the verb, but as a much larger ongoing *continuous* process that, nevertheless, can only recognise itself retroactively. [Back](#)

6 Of course the paradox here is that, for many Cubans, the same words might be used to describe their own regime. There is not space here to go into the often ambivalent relationship *nueva trova* has “enjoyed” with Castro’s government. For an account of this, see Moore, ‘Transformations’. [Back](#)

7 *Canto nuevo* was the name given to the highly coded “protest” music produced in Chile during the years of the Pinochet dictatorship. Following the coup, there was a ban on anything related to *nueva canción* (records, indigenous instruments, performance of or other dissemination of songs associated with the movement). As many of the predominant figures of *nueva canción* (Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani, Angel and Isabel Parra, Patricio Manns) were forced into exile, their music became a way of informing the world outside Chile

of what had been hoped for, lost and destroyed and in soliciting solidarity for various anti-dictatorship causes. Within Chile itself, due to the constraints of censorship and terror, oppositional performers adopted a language of metaphor to voice their criticism. [Back](#)

8 The use of “Messianic” here is a reference to Walter Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in which Benjamin relates the non-successive view of time and history to be found in Jewish mysticism. This is a point picked up on by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (see below). Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245–55. [Back](#)

9 Jara’s posthumous career continues to be a striking phenomenon in Chile and Argentina, especially in rock music culture where recognition of Jara’s music is allied to an oppositional stance otherwise articulated through a rock, or punk rock, aesthetic. Examples include the version of Jara’s ‘El aparecido’ performed by Chilean punk group Los Miserables on their album *Gritos de la calle* (Warner Music Chile 0927425752, 2001) and a tribute album from 2001 featuring rock/hardcore versions of Jara songs by predominantly Chilean and Argentinean groups (*Victor Jara: Tributo Rock* [Ayva/Alerce AV 209, 2001]). [Back](#)

10 Derrida, pp. 28, 63 [Back](#)

11 See Jan Fairley, ‘Alive and Performing in Latin America’, *Popular Music* vii/1 (Jan., 1988), pp. 105–10, in which the author reviews, among other live recordings, the recording of the concert hosted by Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés in Buenos Aires following the return to democracy in Argentina in 1984. That event could as easily have been the departure point for this article, as could Patricio Manns’s 1990 concert, Quilapayún’s 2003 performance in Santiago, and many more. [Back](#)

12 Rather strangely, a version of the song also appeared in a BMW promotional film of 2001 entitled *The Follow*, directed by Wong Kar Wei. This version was recorded by session musicians and a guest vocalist and featured a saxophone performing the melodic hook of the song, suggesting it as a kind of late night jazzy lament. [Back](#)

13 From the album *Pongo En Tus Manos Abiertas* (Jota Jota [Chile] JJL-03, 1969; Warner Music Chile 8573 87604-2, 2001). The translation is that provided by Joan Jara and Adrian Mitchell in the CD liner notes to *Manifiesto* (Castle Communications ESMCD 657, 1998). [Back](#)

14 From the album *Unicornio* (EGREM [Cuba] LD-4019, 1982; Fonomusic [Spain] CD-8034, 1991). The translation is that provided by Rina Benmayor and Félix Cortés in the CD liner notes to *Cuba Classics 1: Silvio Rodríguez Greatest Hits* (Luaka Bop VVR1030032, 1991). [Back](#)

15 Julio Llamazares, *Yellow Rain*, tr. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Harvill, 2003), p. 44 [Back](#)

16 Derrida, p. 9, original emphasis [Back](#)

17 Derrida, p. 97 [Back](#)

18 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. xiv, tr. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 237–58 [Back](#)

19 This information is taken from conversations with Chilean fans of Silvio Rodríguez during the author's visit to Chile in 1995–6. [Back](#)

20 See Víctor Jara: *Te Recuerda Chile*, ed. Omar Jurado & Juan Miguel Morales (Taffala: Editorial Txalaparta, 2003). The Quilapayún concerts to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the coup took place on 10 and 11 September 2003 in the Teatro Telefón in Santiago; these performances and others were subsequently released as the CD/DVD *Quilapayún: El Reencuentro* (Warner Music Argentina 2564-61901-2, 2004). [Back](#)

21 Derrida, p. 104 [Back](#)

22 Derrida, p. 96 [Back](#)

23 Ariel Dorfman, *Exorcising Terror: The Incredible Unending Trial of General Augusto Pinochet* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), pp. 12–13 [Back](#)

24 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 255 [Back](#)

25 Fredric Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A*