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“The ‘No’ Campaign in Chile: Paving a Peaceful Transition to Democracy”  

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The “No” Campaign in Chile: Paving a Peaceful Transition to Democracy

The key to the television campaign’s communicational success rested exactly on that point: the art connected with the campaign. Those people, with their capacity and ability to communicate, were I think the key to its media success.¹

Juan Enrique Forch

The Chilean film No by Pablo Larraín, winner of the Art Cinema Award at Cannes in 2012 and nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in January 2013, recalls the dramatic events that unfolded when a political campaign organized by the opposition managed the very unlikely feat of ousting a dictator. The current popularity of the film is a reflection of the astonishing popularity of the actual “No” Campaign of 1988, when a team of the country’s best publicity agents led the charge to produce the most important “commercial” of the decade: selling the idea of democracy. Their marketing expertise captured the attention of the nation with television segments that did not resemble political campaigns at all but rather showed the energy and spirit of everyday people—mothers, doctors, farmers, students, athletes, dancers, actors and singers—all moving, speaking out, and joining together in the hope of convincing people to vote “No” in a referendum and end fifteen years of Augusto Pinochet’s power.

This paper goes into detail about how the opposition capitalized on their one opportunity to defeat the regime; it provides the back-story of their creative process and includes information from personal interviews and unpublished documents in order to provide a more complete picture of how Chile shed the yolk of a violent, oppressive dictatorship via peaceful and legal means.

A major difference between the 1988 plebiscite and previous ones was that there were international observers and organizations, such as Amnesty International, who had a stake in ensuring the transition to democracy. It would have caused a worldwide outcry had Pinochet denied the results of the vote; plus, it was the dictator himself who had put the referendum into his institutionalization plan, claiming to be the orchestrator of the return to democracy. On August 30, 1988, Pinochet was officially named as the presidential candidate by the junta, the government allowed exiles to return, and most remarkably, they allotted fifteen minutes per day on national television for both the “Yes” and “No” factions’ political spots. The program of electoral propaganda for the plebiscite aired for twenty-seven consecutive days, from September 5th to October 1st, 1988. The spots were scheduled for 11pm, except for weekends, when they aired at 11:30am. These fifteen-minute spots were the only television airtime granted to the opposition in the entire duration of the dictatorship.

The regime had totally controlled television up until the watershed moment of the “No” Campaign in September and October of 1988. Against all odds but with careful strategizing, the

¹ All citations are my translations from the original Spanish.
opposition entered the political realm and had official, albeit limited, media coverage, for the first time since the September 11th coup of 1973. The Campaign left a mark on the nation’s collective memory; its rainbow emblem and the lyrics and tune of its upbeat jingle still stick in people’s minds. This event in Chile’s history represents the “aperture” in politics and society that allowed the country to transition out of dictatorship and return to democracy. The people who brought the “No” television spot to fruition—sociologists, politicians, academics, publicists, filmmakers, and actors—rose to the challenge of arguing their case against Pinochet through their collective campaign. By the time the plebiscite took place on October 5, 1988, the campaign’s artistic efforts were capable of responding to the aspirations of a majority of Chileans. This willingness to enact a change in the political system was not only a result of timely circumstances but also of an energetic collaborative effort that had been years in the making. Certainly, there were a number of serious obstacles to overcome—limited funding, minimal media exposure, and a fearful public—but the hard work and hopeful spirit of the participants changed the course of history. The complex process of the Campaign shows how diverse groups of people, including artists, helped shape an optimistic message for the country’s future.

**Origins of the Campaign and Who’s Who**

There is very little scholarship about this campaign: one publication, *La Campaña del NO vista por sus creadores* (1989), a documentary film, *La alegría de los otros: el 5-0 visto desde lejos* (2008), and Larrain’s feature film *No* (2012). This has made it difficult to know who was responsible for what and how the campaign was realized. Documentary filmmaker Ignacio Agüero, the chief editor and general director who was also responsible for a few of the television spots, explained the process to me and emphasized the unprecedented modern feel of the Campaign and the hard work of many individuals who contributed their time and talents for free. In June of 1988, Agüero received the call to direct alongside Eduardo Tironi, who had experience with television. Tironi followed in the footsteps of his father, who founded Canal 13 in August of 1959. After the Campaign, Tironi created a cultural cable channel called ARTV, which started transmitting in 1992. The three directors of the “No” programs were Ignacio Agüero, Eduardo Tironi, and Juan Enrique Forch. More specifically, Tironi was a producer and in charge of the overall project, Agüero was the editor and general director, and Forch was a producer and coordinator of the directors who were doing different parts of the *franja*, or television program (Personal interview with Forch, 12 Dec. 2009). Agüero also directed a few spots and Forch directed certain pieces that later became known as “forchazos”. Agüero recalls that the group of creative directors (from Chile’s

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2 Eduardo’s brother, the sociologist, author, academic, and consultant to international organizations, Eugenio Tironi, was working with the group of politicians. Eugenio served as Director of the Secretary for Communication and Culture under Aylwin’s presidency from 1990 to 1994.
largest advertising agencies) consisted of José Salcedo, Eugenio García, Geraldine Walker, and others (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009).

When I asked Agüero about the various committees and the collaboration between politicians and publicists, and who came up with and agreed upon the optimistic slogan of “Chile, la alegría ya viene” (“Chile, happiness is coming”), Agüero ponders the question and says there is no clear answer. The Campaign started with a group of young politicians who had decided to combat the dictatorship from within the framework of the 1980 Constitution; Agüero attributes the idea to Christian Democrat Edgardo Boeninger and the historian and academic, Sofía Correa, saying they began to work toward their objective from at least four years prior to the plebiscite (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). Boeninger was a long-standing member of the Christian Democrat party, serving as Vice President from 1987 to 1989, and he helped in the formation of the Coalition of Parties for the No. Previously, he was the national Budget Director for President Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-1969), and after that, he was the dean and then rector at the University of Chile Economics Department until the coup d’état of 1973. After the democratic elections in 1990, Boeninger was Secretary General for Patricio Aylwin’s presidency (1990-1994).

Boeninger and Correa saw the plebiscite as the one opportunity to defeat Pinochet, so they created a group that studied political campaigns from all over the world, especially North America. Their aim was to unify many political parties into one faction for the “No” vote but to grant autonomy to politicians and creative directors for the actual television spots. This key element to the referendum was not to be dictated by political parties taking up the screen with their faces, and it took some convincing. Traditionally, politicians see a television spot as the opportunity to showcase a candidate, but in this case they were to direct the politics of the campaign, staying out of the media portion. They studied international campaigns and worked toward creating a political message that would attract the majority of Chileans with a positive discourse. Agüero says it was their intention not to be confrontational, “or confrontational only with the figure of Pinochet and nothing else” (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). The message was to be an optimistic one for the future with a modern outlook as seen in the international campaigns, a message that took into consideration television culture and an up-to-date language of political communication, since Chilean politicians had not had any elections since 1973.

Where Agüero could not recall details of the origin of the Campaign’s concept, Juan Forch was able to fill in the blanks.³ Forch studied video-art in Europe and in Chile, studied sociology for two years,

³ Forch was a filmmaker who had once belonged to the Communist Party and had worked doing documentaries with Chile Films during the Allende years; for this reason it was easy to track him and he was taken prisoner during the coup while working on a documentary in Concepción. But he was released along with his fellow prisoners because his father, Juan Forch Petit, was an army general who could have become Commander in Chief in place of the assassinated René Schneider, but he resigned in 1968. A phone call from his well-respected father got the order to release his son, but Forch was not satisfied with this and demanded that the entire crew that accompanied him be set
and worked in journalism to pursue his passion for writing. After the Campaña del “No,” he worked on Patricio Aylwin’s campaign in 1990, then headed Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle’s campaign, and has worked on Presidential campaigns in Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Forch informs me that it was Genaro Arriagada, a militant member of the Christian Democratic party since 1963, who served as Secretary for the Coalition of Parties for Democracy and was head of the “No” Campaign. He was the link between the politicians, the technical committee, and the publicists. Arriagada put the Campaign’s design and conception in the publicists’ hands, arming them with the information from the quantitative and qualitative studies, including the surveys that the technical committee had conducted (Personal interview, 8 May 2010). The surveys were carried out by the twenty-five people who belonged to the CIS, an amalgamation of three different groups: the Centro de Estudios Democráticos, Illet, and Sur. They would meet, conduct focus groups, and realize a number of opinion polls. This information was then turned over to José Manuel Salcedo, a well-respected publicist with a long trajectory in the Christian Democrat party.4 Arriagada asked that Salcedo direct a group of publicists and communications experts to come up with the design of the Campaign. Salcedo attended one meeting and disbanded the entire group to make up his own; he included Eugenio García and Raúl Menjíbar and kept only one original member from the previous group, an older publicist called Ernesto Marino. This group went away to a spiritual retreat center called Patagüilla (a priest lent them the space for a long weekend), and from there the concept and the slogan of the Campaign were born.

The group started with the idea of “un Chile para todos” (“a Chile for everyone”), but they realized that this phrase was not a call to all Chileans but rather to those who had been excluded. So they threw out the idea and began from a new angle: the notion that without a doubt, “alegría” (“joy”) was imminent. Forch points out that the word “alegría” is a difficult one to translate into other languages; it has a special meaning that is not merely “happiness” nor “revelry” but encompasses many types of joy. They worked the theme from various angles: Chile had been living in the darkness and the light must appear somewhere soon; there is calm after the storm, after winter must come spring, etc. From the concept of “alegría” they arrived at the slogan “Chile, viene la alegría” (“Chile, happiness is coming”). But this phrase was not sufficiently appealing because it lacked a certain poetic rhythm, so they incorporated the word “ya” (“already”), another word that is not easily translated but which connotes free, which they were. For more information on Forch, see Ximena Pérez Villamil’s article, “Juan Forch: Campeón en varias campañas”.

The unpublished material that I have been able to use for this study Forch passed directly to me in May of 2010 from his personal collection of documents. After considerable e-mail correspondence and our interview, he suddenly remembered that he had more information that could benefit my study and sent me Campaign notes, transcribed dialogues, and interviews.

4 Salcedo was also a theater actor who had appeared in many ICTUS productions as well as in playwright David Benavente’s anti-dictatorship theater-circus, which was burned down in 1979.
immediacy. Thus the slogan: “Chile, la alegria ya viene” and from there the emblem of the rainbow was added, which Reverend Jesse Jackson had used in his 1984 campaign for president.5

The rainbow signifies the end to the rain or the storm, because the sun is shining somewhere. In the Christian imaginary and surely in the minds of all of Chile’s Christian Democrats, it signifies God’s promise to his people, after the great flood, that he will never destroy mankind again. But at the same time, the rainbow denotes diversity. In Forch’s words: “All the colors are presented in that happiness, we all fit into that rainbow” (Personal interview, 8 May 2010).

Above: Jesse Jackson’s banner for his run for the Democratic party nomination for U.S. President in 1984, the same year he founded The National Rainbow Coalition, which demanded social programs, voting rights and affirmative action for groups that had been neglected by Reaganomics.

The NO emblem for the “No” Campaign in Chile.

This concept and slogan were then presented to the political committee, led by Arriagada, who at first thought it was some sort of joke. But Salcedo explained the rationale of how they had come up with it, and he asked the politicians to say if they agreed or not, point by point, with the rationale. With his presentation, he convinced them of the concept, and then they went to the technical committee, who immediately approved of the slogan and ideas. When I asked Forch what he thought was a key element for the Campaign’s success, he responded that this strategy of offering “alegria” truly worked well.

5 Jackson gave the Keynote Address at the U.S. Democratic National Convention on July 18, 1984, “The Rainbow Coalition,” calling for racial minority groups, youth, lesbians and gays, the poor, disabled veterans, and small farmers to join African Americans in their quest for political empowerment. Jackson lost the Democratic party nomination to Walter Mondale, who ultimately was defeated by Republican candidate Ronald Reagan.
because this was proposing a change for Chile, certainly one for the better. The form was even more innovative than the concept, and through audiovisual means they were able to convince the public that happiness was on its way back to their nation. The notion of “alegría” also was a broad term, one that could be interpreted differently by each person according to his or her situation: it could mean a job for the unemployed, a home for the homeless, a reconciliation to someone who had experienced a fallout with his brother for political reasons. It all fit under the umbrella of “alegría” and it was a cut above the darkness and violence represented in Pinochet’s campaign (Forch, Personal interview, 8 May 2010).

Capturing the Nation’s Attention and Making History

The television campaign included testimonies, pertinent information, and commercial spots within the program, all artfully crafted so as to achieve maximum communicational effect with the public. The fact that the clips were engaging, entertaining, and interesting gave the creative team impetus to continue working toward reaching their objective. The notion that a dictator could be toppled with a plebiscite was a totally new concept, something that Agüero says had not happened anywhere before; Chile was making history. A dictator with absolute control can distort voting results, which had happened as recently as 1980 in Chile. The preparation was a key element of the Campaign, one that for at least four years had been underway with Boeninger’s group of politicians. They had compiled an efficient and technologically sophisticated system that kept track of all sorts of information through public opinion polls and other means (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). With this, they were cognizant of the votes as they came in. Pinochet seemed rooted in his more and more personalist regime; he had been supported by President Nixon in the early years and reinforced with President Reagan’s stance on anticommunism (Loveman 298). But by the time of the 1988 plebiscite, the world, including the Reagan administration, had a watchful eye on dictators and pressure was on for the transition to democracy.

It was not only the political atmosphere that tipped the scales in the “No” camp’s favor but also the twenty-seven carefully crafted television spots, which took hold of people’s attention like a favorite soap opera. Although the government controlled all of television broadcasting save the fifteen minutes dedicated to the “No” Campaign, Chileans saw the two franjas, or television promotions, as two equal opponents. In Forch’s opinion, viewers were thinking of who would win the battle according to who had the better television campaign. He says that the quality of the television portion was really important to Chileans, who at the time had become a television-obsessed culture: “People weren’t even thinking about who was going to have the better government for the future, because they were so focused on this television combat” (Personal interview, 8 May 2010).

The research supports Forch’s observation. Opinion polls using a common methodology for the evaluation of commercial publicity campaigns showed that indeed Chileans were glued to their TV sets at
night throughout the duration of the Campaign. The co-authors of “¿Por qué ganó el ‘NO’?”, Roberto Méndez, Oscar Godoy, Enrique Barros, and Arturo Fontaine, pose this question of why the “No” won the plebiscite, especially considering that all their public opinion polls, covering urban and rural zones, showed that the “Yes” and the “No” were virtually tied in June of 1988. By September there was a significant change, from 39% voting “Yes” and 38% voting “No” in June, to 28% voting “Yes” and 57% voting “No” three months later. The three demographic groups that modified their intention to vote within that time frame were women, people of a low socio-economic level, and voters in rural areas (93). Méndez explains that in that period, the most relevant political events were the nomination of the candidate and the publicity programs. The naming of Pinochet was expected, so it probably did not greatly change voting intentions. Deducing from this, Méndez turns his attention to the franjas and charts the results of an opinion poll whereby people were asked to compare the two programs, answering a series of questions that start with “Which publicity campaign do you think is…?” In all the following areas, the “No” Campaign far outscored the “Yes”: It is the more entertaining one, gets through to more people, is more inspirational, is more clear/understandable, is more dynamic, is more optimistic, is more credible, is more appropriate for a political campaign, and conveys better capability of governing the country. The discrepancy, for example for the “more entertaining” campaign, 16% to 62% in favor of No, demonstrates that even people who voted Yes evaluated their own publicity campaign negatively (94).

Taking a closer look at the three demographics that experienced a significant shift between June and September of 1988—women, the poor, and people in rural areas—it is evident that they are all represented in the “No” Campaign. The three groupings are also people most often marginalized from society. The franja was not just the frantic work editing per program during the twenty-seven days that it aired—it was the culmination of months of research, focus groups, and fieldwork. The September 8 program emphasizes the more remote, rural areas of the country, and small towns. The campaign’s anchorman, Patricio Bañados, chosen because he was a recognizable and trusted television personality, states that these types of places are certainly not absent from the program. He explains that they have been controlled and fearful, and then we see footage of the countryside and then interviewers from the “No” side go out and speak to the people, asking them questions and letting them answer candidly. Women speak about the struggles of daily life, trying to feed families on what amounts to less than two dollars per week. A band of young teenagers say they would vote “No,” and they explain why they have not been able to get an education due to their parents’ lack of resources. And then the narration comes full circle about people being controlled and intimidated when a group of young schoolgirls, holding glossy posters of different sizes, explains that they were given all these materials for free. They are all portraits of Pinochet.
The Campaign provided a forum for people to express out loud what their realities were, what they were frustrated with or fearful of, and why they would vote out the dictator and welcome any kind of change. The fact that testimonies from the rural poor, women, and youth were seen on national TV, most likely by those people themselves alongside their friends and loved ones, gave the “No” Campaign a note of authenticity and true representation for the whole of society, even the most marginalized sectors. To see people speaking out would have assuaged others’ fears as well, a huge feat for the Campaign. The months of preparation plus taking a personal interest in people’s stories, paid off in the shift of voting seen between June and September.

Collaboration, Euphoria and The Real Talent

It is no wonder that the Chilean population was so eager to absorb all the details and facets of the “No” Campaign, because for the first time in fifteen years there was a multiplicity of voices being represented on-screen, a variation from the single voice that had been ruling the airwaves, the press, and the radio for fifteen years. It is also no surprise that so many artists were eager to contribute—it was their first chance to showcase their talents to a mainstream audience. As a film maker trying to do his craft during the dictatorship, Agüero echoes the sentiments of other filmmakers and playwrights regarding the lack of funding, opportunities, and support for the arts: “There was no support, nothing official, not even a little window…” (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). In order to make money to support his own endeavors with film, Agüero worked in advertising, as many other filmmakers did during the dictatorship. This background gave him the know-how for the Campaign’s franja.

Forch describes this phenomenon as a sort of double life or “schizophrenia”; plenty of artists segued into the publicity realm in order to make money, but their real talents and passions lay elsewhere. He explains that during the dictatorship, many creative people took refuge in the advertising and publicity world, since they could not develop artistically within their chosen disciplines (Personal interview, 8 May 2010). Forch uses Agüero’s work as an example of this “schizophrenic” reality that they lived for many years. The documentary No olvidar (Not to Forget) was a poignant and denunciatory exposé about dozens of farmers who had been murdered and their bodies thrown into massive ovens in Lonquén. The film was shown publicly, albeit via what Forch calls “alternative circuits,” as opposed to the official circuit. Meanwhile, Agüero continued his job, making commercials for agencies and clients that were pro-Pinochet. Forch remembers the power of Agüero’s No olvidar and that it was not released clandestinely. However, Agüero did in fact use a pseudonym, Pedro Meneses, for this undertaking (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). Many creative people led similar “double lives”; inside advertising agencies, there were editors, creative directors, and art directors who were fervidly against the dictatorship (Personal interview with Forch, 8 May 2010). This set Chilean publicists apart from others in Latin America or Europe; they
comprised the finest intelligentsia in the country whose only chance at surviving was to work in
advertising. Thus, as Forch explains, “the television campaign was not done just by publicists or
producers but was done by the best people that were here.”

Agüero makes the point that throughout the eighties, there was a lot of new language to
incorporate from the audiovisual realm. Politics within this context became a product to be sold, as it
would be in a television commercial. That is why it was so important that the politicians consulted Chile’s
top creative directors. Working together on the concept came before any concrete plan for the audiovisual
aspect. The Campaign started with the “No” politicians, including Andrés Zaldívar (Minister of Finance
and Economy under Allende and President of the Christian Democrats from 1976-1982), Patricio Aylwin
(who would become the first President of the Coalition in 1990, responsible for the Truth and
Reconciliation Commission), Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (Christian Democrat within the Coalition who
succeeded Aylwin as President, 1994-2000), and Ricardo Lagos (Socialist Party within the Coalition and
President after Frei, 2000-2006). They collaborated with Salcedo and the other creative directors, and
then a complex assembly of sociologists, experts in opinion polls, and people who were like a democratic
intelligentsia joined the fold (Personal interview with Agüero, 13 Oct. 2009). This collective effort turned
into a successful campaign, one that all participants declared “unprecedented in Chile” (“Presentación” 1,
La Campaña del No vista por sus creadores”).

The atmosphere of the Campaign is described by Eugenio Tironi as follows: “a relaxed
atmosphere, of great trust, happiness, and peace” (La Campaña del No vista por sus creadores, 5).
Agüero recalls that it was a beautiful, almost mystic moment of “national euphoria,” a unique time of
people collaborating (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). The notion of working together toward a
common goal was something that politicians and others were not used to, given the closed off and
individualized manner in which Chileans had learned to behave during the dictatorship. Due to the
magnitude of the challenge and the depths of the people’s despair, the Campaign intended to purvey hope
and optimism and to appeal to the vast majority of the Chilean people. The prologue to La Campaña del
No vista por sus creadores explains this feat as a productive intellectual collaboration, whereby the
strategy was to return to basics and pay attention to the problems of the ordinary Chilean citizen, as
opposed to drifting into complicated debates that risked losing the audience in ideological twists and
turns. Tironi expresses how the simplest sermons took on special meaning in the darkest days of the
dictatorship; priests’ references to concepts such as charity, loving thy neighbor, reconciliation, peace,
forgiveness, the value of each person, and the superiority of good morals, had a profound effect in the
extenuating circumstances. The notion of unity and of upholding fundamental principles and morals
outweighed ideological differences or divisions along party lines. Tironi attributes the success of the “No”
Campaign to this spirit of togetherness. To witness members of various political parties working toward a
common goal showed that Chile had undergone a noteworthy change for the better: “The war between the parties, which had been one of the main causes of the destruction of Chilean democracy in 1973, had come to a close” (5).

This unparalleled ambience of unity and collaboration reached beyond the political parties and advertising networks. As Agüero explains, everyone wanted to contribute something to the Campaign. Throngs of people came by where he was working to offer whatever they could, including materials that ended up in the programs. For example, the program about censorship, which aired on Sept. 13, included a video clip entitled “La censura no existe” (“Censorship Doesn’t Exist”), which showed dozens of sites where people had covered the city’s surfaces with graffiti. The images range from drawings, slogans quickly sprayed onto walls on side streets, and a few “NO +” (“No más”) phrases (the project started by the subversive group CADA, Colectivo Acciones de Arte), such as “NO + guerra” (“No more war”) and “NO + Pinocho”. The creator and editor of this video, Rodrigo Sepúlveda, turned it in to the “No” team, already edited and with an upbeat soundtrack, so they were able to use it (Agüero, “Reportaje a la Campaña del NO” 5).

Above: One of the original banners hung up in Santiago by CADA, which was torn down by military patrolmen as soon as they discovered it.

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6 New York University’s Hemispheric Institute has a collection of CADA’s art actions, and many images, videos, and data can be accessed online via their Digital Video Library (www.hidvl.nyu.edu).
Protesters using the “NO +” idea to complete their phrase “No más miedo” (“No more fear”).

There was plenty of material that went unused, but the group effort and spirit of optimism is something Agüero says has been unmatched since (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). The Campaign did not show any credits; no one’s name was connected to any aspect of the production, and there was no way of knowing who was responsible for which piece. Despite the anonymity, people did know who the main people were of the Campaign’s production. There were a few isolated instances of people being followed by dark cars as they left the studio, but the atmosphere of euphoria outweighed any potential threats (Personal interview with Forch, 8 May 2010). The directors and others involved did not have any problem saying that they were with the “No” Campaign, and for the most part, everyone worked for free, around the clock, toward their objective.\footnote{Both Agüero and Forch confirmed that they and everyone they knew contributed countless hours of work and all their resources without collecting any wages. The only exception was for the crew members and other day laborers.}

All the different people who appeared in the television campaign allowed Chileans to lose their fear because there was such a broad spectrum of individuals represented, including those who had been pro-Pinochet but now were eager to vote “No”. There were also plenty of international stars who showed the world their concern for the plebiscite and a return to democracy for Chile. Among these were Jane Fonda, Richard Dreyfuss, Sarita Montiel, Robert Blake, Paloma San Basilio, Christopher Reeves (who most Chileans refer to simply as “Superman”), Sting, who incorporated a Spanish verse into his music in support of democracy and human rights in Chile; the Spanish ballad singer Joan Manuel Serrat, who is shown performing a concert in two programs and then being interviewed so that he can reiterate support for his beloved people of Chile (13 and 17 Sept. 1988); and not least of all, the Nueva Trova legend from Cuba: Silvio Rodríguez, who also appears twice (on September 8 and 14) singing “El unicornio azul” and then “Vamos a andar”. In the introduction for “El unicornio azul,” Bañados explains that for the years of the regime, many aspects of culture and art have been shut out of this medium, television, so they are
taking advantage of their fifteen minutes to share things such as Rodriguez’s music. For the September 14 program, Bañados uses the program’s theme, censorship, to segue to the performance of “Vamos a andar”: “Without censorship, we will now listen to Silvio Rodríguez.”

It was also Chile’s resident stars that came out to say that they were voting No—soap opera stars, footballers, and other public figures—and this gave people strength. Artists and authors also contributed material or, in the case of author Jorge Edwards, appeared to protest against censorship. Isabel Allende appears from abroad to support her home country. There is an homage to Pablo Neruda, who Bañados reminds the audience died fifteen years ago without the ceremony and honor he deserved; this program (September 23) includes a clip of Neruda reciting his “Poema 20”. The author Gregory Cohen acts in a humorous clip, “Sir, what would you say to a dictator?”, where he is reading a book and is asked this question. He looks to both sides, opens his mouth and the sound of a lion’s roar comes out, on his tongue is a sticker of the emblem: “NO” in black ink with a rainbow in the background. Luis Mora was in charge of all the spots that use humor as their main recourse (E-mail with Forch, 12 Dec. 2009). Juan Downey, Chilean artist in New York during the regime, handed in a clip, which flashed different fonts and colors of the word “no,” set to the beat of African drums and a voice in crescendo chanting “no” (11 Sept. 1988). The ICTUS actors along with others from the TV program La Manivela, appear and act out a skit in the September 13 program.8 The most famous soccer player in Chile at the time, Carlos Caszely, spoke out against torture (15 Sept. 1988), sharing his testimony about his mother who had been tortured by the military; no one had ever heard this before, and the franja was his opportunity to tell the story.

Downey’s clip is one of the only ones where the audience is informed as to who created it. The vast majority of the Campaign’s segments were unidentified at the time (11 Sept. 1988). But Bañados uses this opportunity to signal the importance of collective creativity. He says to the viewer, you probably ask yourself, how do we make this program? And he promptly answers: “The truth is that the only thing I can tell you is that this program is the sum of the creative and enthusiastic contributions of artists, musicians, journalists, actors that have collaborated with great enthusiasm.” With this he segues to Downey’s graphic video, the perfect example of this kind of collaboration.

Capturing the Attention of the Nation

The “No” Campaign poured years of effort, data collection, and advertising expertise into their endeavor, whereas the “Yes” Campaign had assumed that they would win without much difficulty. All

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8 La Manivela was switched from Channel 13 (of the Universidad Católica de Chile) to Channel 9 (belonging to the Universidad de Chile) because of its messages aligning with the leftist political causes. It was taken off the air after the coup, to be salvaged again briefly by the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso channel. Despite self-censorship, it was taken off the air and the connection between Ictus and television was cut definitively (Information from the U-matic website umatic.cl under the heading “Historia del video en Chile”).
the good publicists, everyone that Agüero and his colleagues knew, were on the “No” side. In terms of audiovisual competition, the “No” Campaign was hands-down superior (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). The documentation of the various opinion polls in “¿Por qué ganó el ‘NO’?” supports this claim.

The “Yes” Campaign had two phases; the first team was intellectually inferior, so they were replaced by a second team who was better prepared, ideologically, politically, and culturally, but as Forch recalls, “I think they had serious conceptual failures” (Personal interview, 8 May 2010). They committed what Forch sees as a very basic communicational error: they denounced the opposition with a campaign that aimed to demonstrate the chaos that would ensue if the political parties for the “No” were to win. Their campaign was full of violence, terror, and delinquency, but the intention to point the finger at the other side as the perpetrator rebounded back at them. Although he understands why they did it, he explains how their tactic did not go as planned. The hitch with political communication is that people identify the image with the transmitter, so the terror was associated with the “Yes” Campaign and not the other way around. Forch stresses the fact that even when the “No” Campaign spoke of torture or disappeared victims, they did not show it. Forch admits that he is not sure whether they were conscious of this strategy—avoiding negative imagery with the denunciation of certain aspects of the dictatorship—it was not their explicit intention. He says, “But at the time, it was not talked about nor discussed, approved, explained, or premeditated” (Personal interview, 8 May 2010). In retrospect, the victors can appreciate the efficacy of their method.

The programs as a whole included pertinent information and messages that addressed people’s concerns—the economy, human rights, delinquency, violence and security, unemployment, upholding basic tenets of the Catholic Church, the pain of exile, and political freedom. But the way all of this was communicated was so effective because the directors incorporated the freeform and energy of the arts. It seems that the “Yes” Campaign borrowed from this successful formula since the part of their program with their jingle, “Diga Sí” (“Say Yes”) is accompanied with similar characters and activities.

The success of the “No” Campaign depended on multiple individuals and groups, and the opposition was at a disadvantage compared to the “Yes” faction—in terms of financing for electoral activities and especially in terms of their extremely limited television access. The fifteen minutes granted to the opposition was pushed to as late as possible, with the idea that a bare minimum of people would be watching television at 11pm. But this tight regulation had the opposite effect: for those fifteen minutes, the entire country was watching. As Agüero describes the Campaign: “It was an island! Impressive because it was a totally different and contradictory message to all that was said during the rest of the day” (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). It was also a unique aspect of the “No” Campaign that they had no alternative—the fifteen minutes of television time allotted to them was the only free space they had for their campaign. José Salcedo says that for fifteen and a half years, the opposition never had any form of
media coverage, so their appearance on television created quite a stir: “it constituted an absolutely extraordinary and exceptional event that deservedly aroused general interest, which raised the ratings of those television spots to over 90%” (“Estructura Documental del NO” 1). One of the publicists, Diego Portales, explains that the creative committee was well aware of the enormous imbalance in terms of media resources available to them, compared with the “Yes” option. Faced with this challenge, the team knew that the turning point would not depend on an abundance of resources but rather on the capacity to mobilize political action throughout the entire country (La Campaña del No vista por sus creadores 87).

Agüero recalls that while the Campaign’s television spot aired, there was absolutely no one in the streets; everyone without exception was watching, including the military officials and soldiers. Messages and letters poured in to the organizers, commenting on the programs. Mariano Fernández, a Christian Democrat, asserts that the task for the opposition was enormous, and he credits the Campaign’s hard work and creativity. Fernández was exiled in Germany from 1974 until 1982, and upon return to Chile he served as a researcher for the executive committee of the Center for Development Studies. In his words, “The manipulation and lack of television access almost transformed into an advantage, because the NO team that was formed to make the television spot had to concentrate on those daily fifteen minutes, and they produced a compact, beautiful, high quality program, of high technical and communicational quality” (La Campaña del No vista por sus creadores 6).

Instilling Confidence in the Opposition and Taking the Dictator Down a Notch, or Two

Another unforeseen advantage for the “No” team was that anyone who was not pro-Pinochet could potentially become part of the opposition, since the plebiscite was designed around one sole candidate: Pinochet. As stipulated in the Constitution of 1980, the “Yes” or “No” vote was purely for him or against him as a potential presidential candidate in democratic elections, and the politicians as well as the creative directors took full advantage of this fact. Forch dedicated a lot of his energy to the figure of Pinochet in his video clips. He brought his knowledge of video-art and filmmaking to the Campaign and focused on critiquing Pinochet with images. Agüero points out that Forch’s short clips were so effective because on national television, for the first time, all of Chile could see Pinochet being stripped of his authority through the images. Forch himself defines the “forchazos” as audiovisual vignettes that revealed evident truths, which were veiled in some way. They were practically “axioms,” proposing something people knew to be true, without the need for much explanation (10; “Estructura Documental del NO”).

Forch recognizes that they had a certain aesthetic quality, which he attributes to his background in video-art, but the main idea was to tell the people something they already knew—that which Pinochet’s side did not want people to see. Bringing Pinochet down a notch helped people to let go of their fears; seeing his
image mocked on-screen for the first time had a profound effect. Agüero reiterates the importance of making the Chilean people lose their fear, “it was the main issue” (Reportaje a la Campaña del NO” 7).

Out of twenty-seven programs, only one was censored. Its theme was torture, and on September 12, 1988, the program opens with the message: “This program was censored” across the screen. The “Yes” side came to realize that censorship was a bad idea for them; the “No” Campaign won votes because of it (Personal interview with Agüero, 13 Oct. 2009). Bañados greets the audience as usual, saying that the campaign is in its second week, but things are not quite balanced. The “No” supporters have energy and “alegría,” but the “Yes” side has the monopoly of television coverage. He reminds his listeners that this is their only airtime: fifteen minutes. The theme of torture reenters the Campaign via testimonies and imagery of the protest “En Chile se tortura” (“Torture in Chile”), where the people are dispersed with the force of a fire-hose (20 Sept. 1988).

Agüero, Forch, and Salcedo agree that the televised campaign was the number one determining factor for the victory. Before that moment, a public image of the opposition did not exist, except in left-leaning and small-scale publications such as Análisis, Apsi, Fortín Mapocho, and La Época. Mass media consisted of the national newspaper El Mercurio and regime-controlled television. Agüero explains that the people could see that the opposition was not plagued by chaos, rather they projected an image of competence; this instilled the Chilean citizens with confidence in the opposition. It became feasible that the “No” could win and could do so without a return to the violence of the past. Agüero perceived this as a vital part of the struggle, to convince people that defeating Pinochet was not a return to violence but rather the road to peace (Personal interview, Oct. 13 2009). The Campaign directors were savvy to the needs of the Chilean public, and they had the tools to communicate effectively in an audiovisual language, one that the people could relate to. Due to extended periods of time in which people were subjected to a nationwide curfew, the main activity for a Chilean family was to watch television together. Also, because of the relative economic prosperity and the lack of film opportunities, many talented people ended up in the advertising world. There was a plethora of commercial campaigns during the eighties, and they were of good quality. Agüero asserts that publicity became a common household theme; people would sit around the dinner table and discuss the latest commercials (Personal interview; 13 Oct. 2009). The Chilean people were totally immersed in this culture, and the “No” Campaign incorporated this into the fifteen-minute programs as precise and focused “commercials” for the “No” vote. These would repeat within the framework of the twenty-seven programs as actual commercials do, and people inevitably developed their favorite ones.

The topics covered in the franja had universal appeal; there were no political party lines but rather an effort to address all Chileans simply as people with the right to be happy. Besides his main task of editing, Agüero also filmed a few spots, his favorite of which was about human rights. He worked with
the women from the Association for the Detained and Disappeared for this clip. (Los desaparecidos, or “the disappeared,” are the victims of the regime’s violence, those who were detained and kidnapped, possibly sent to concentration camps or executed, never to be seen again). The women appeared wearing images of their missing loved ones on their chests as the names were written across the screen. The setting is a sparse theater, and the women dance Chile’s national dance, “la cueca,” all alone without a partner. The cueca is the ultimate representation of Chilean patriotism and is especially performed on Independence Day. Agüero says about the clip: “It was very simple, very beautiful, very expressive” (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009). Forch also refers to this particular clip as an exquisite scene, done with cinematographic lighting and an appealing aesthetic, despite the “brutal dramatism” of its message (Personal interview, 8 May 2010). Forch explains that this clip is a perfect example of the “No” Campaign taking care not to show ugly or violent imagery, but rather they got their messages across in appealing, provocative ways. The theme of human rights in the clips was a controversial one because the group of politicians deemed it a topic for all humanity and not just for the repressed sector. They wished to avoid it altogether—and, in Agüero’s opinion, the theme of human rights was a weak point of the campaign as a result—but the clip eventually was passed (Personal interview, 13 Oct. 2009).

I disagree with Agüero on this point; I think that the Campaign managed to advocate for human rights without lashing out against the perpetrator of the abuses. The program on September 20 includes Sting’s tribute to los desaparecidos, “They Dance Alone” (from his 1987 album Nothing like the Sun) in conjunction with Agüero’s clip of the women dancing “la cueca sola.” On September 24, Sting is shown at a major concert, dedicating his song to Chile, saying in Spanish, “Chileans deserve a democratic leader whose hands are not stained with the blood of his own people.” There are also testimonies by ordinary citizens, former politicians, and government officials about the need for reconciliation and remembrance for the victims of physical and moral torture, and the desire to move forward. They speak of unity, mutual respect, freedom, health, justice, and solidarity. It is every citizen’s desire and right to live without fear. There is also a clip that documents high profile assassinations and crimes perpetrated by agents of Pinochet’s government: Carlos Prats, ex-Army Commander and his wife, killed in a car bomb in Buenos Aires (30 Sept. 1974); Bernardo Leighton and his wife, severely injured in Rome (6 Oct. 1975); and ex-Chancellor Orlando Letelier, killed in Washington D.C. (21 Sept. 1976). Sofia Prats, daughter of Prats, speaks out for justice and clarification. Instead of obstructing justice, it is time to seek it—but without hatred, without vengeance—with peace.

**Communicational Success**

The optimism of the Campaign coupled with confident and knowledgeable Chileans addressing their compatriots was the winning combination, one that convinced voters that they had the potential to
usher in a better phase for their nation. As evidenced in both the government’s and the opposition’s public opinion polls and research, the television campaign itself swayed crucial votes from “Yes” to “No.” People across the spectrum were able to relate to some aspect of the Campaign and feel that it was speaking directly into their lives. The Coalition of Parties for the No intentionally aimed to cross party lines and portray an image of unity, but the way this was communicated depended on the work of the directors and artists involved in the television campaign. The key for success was the way all of the messages of hope were communicated to the public. The majority of the participants that worked on the Campaign had maintained a connection to the arts world throughout the regime. As Forch puts it, they had kept up two parallel activities: “developing some kind of art expression as part of a work of resistance and spiritual survival, and working in publicity as a form of subsistence” (E-mail, 12 Dec. 2009).

I believe that the directors’ expertise in publicity and their ability to sell the idea of a return to democracy rested in part on this connection to the arts. They maintained successful careers as advertising executives and creative directors in the age of consumerism and commercials but were willing and able to pour their talents and energy into the “No” Campaign, this endeavor that uprooted a dictator and changed the course of Chile’s history. The Coalition ruled in Chile for the next twenty years, starting with Patricio Aylwin’s presidency in 1990, up until the conservative candidate Sebastián Piñera beat Eduardo Frei in the presidential elections of 2010. Ironically, Piñera did so by appropriating the language, aesthetics, and message of the Coalition for his own campaign when he saw that Frei had gone in a completely different direction with an intellectual, minimalist campaign. The 2010 campaign song “Súmate al cambio” (“Join in the change”) included the refrain “Porque digan lo que digan” (“Because say what they may”) echoing the opening lines of the jingle, “La alegría ya viene” (Sánchez n.p.). Piñera’s rainbow colored star brightened street corners, plazas, and downtown avenues, reminiscent of the “No” emblem, which is ingrained in the collective memory as the symbol of a new dawn for Chile.
Many people comment that the 1988 Campaign’s atmosphere of euphoria and idealism was unsurpassed. Naturally, after almost two decades in power, the Coalition disappointed certain sectors of society and the country was ready for a change. But this does not mean that the Campaign did not fulfill its promise. When I asked Forch if he thought that joy came to Chile with the Campaign, he answers without hesitation, certainly yes. “La alegría” was the possibility to oust Pinochet and to return to democracy. Although democracy is not “paradise on earth,” it is the promise to live without fear and reprisals, to have freedom of expression, to be able to participate in public life, and to never suffer persecution and torture for declaring your beliefs (Personal interview, 8 May 2010). The Campaign was the tipping point, and the record number of eligible voters at the polls, almost 92%, proved that the people had conquered their skepticism and their fears; they were ready to live out the exhilarating atmosphere depicted in the franja.
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