

When the Copywriter is the Protagonist. History and Intermediality in Pablo Larraín's *No* (2012)

Francesco Zucconi

École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris (France)

E-mail: francesco.zucconi@ehess.fr

Abstract. Through films such as *Tony Manero* (2008), *Santiago 73*, *Post Mortem* (2010), and *No* (2012), the productions of Chilean director Pablo Larraín have focused on the historical and political themes that marked the last decades in the life of his country: the putsch against Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. This paper analyses the last film of the trilogy, dedicated to the 1988 Chilean national plebiscite and the communication battle between supporters of the “Yes” and “No” sides. Why does Larraín identify the copywriter René Saavedra as the main character of the film? And why does the film accord such importance to the advertising campaign in recounting the historical reality of democratic transition? How does the fictional film remediate the archival footage of the 1988 campaign? To answer these questions, this paper investigates the film as an audiovisual form of interpretation of historical events and film montage as an intermedial “authentication” of the archival documents relating to this traumatic past.

Keywords: the Chilean democratic transition, heterotopia and utopia, history and intermediality, intermedial “authentication,” Pablo Larraín's cinema.

The Trilogy as a “Theoretical Work”

The early productions of Chilean director Pablo Larraín focus on the main historical and political issues that have marked the life of his country over the past 45 years: the putsch against Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. Although he has always acknowledged a great debt towards the Chilean master of the documentary, Patricio Guzmán, Larraín does not seem to embrace a “direct” view of history. Instead, he has looked for unusual perspectives and an alienated point of view. He seems to be more attracted to the transfiguring potential of fiction rather than to the realism of documentary. Indeed, he appears to be oriented toward overcoming this sort of opposition, guided by his efforts to

reveal to the spectator the different “fictional levels” of social reality. The writing of history has its own rules and forms. Some of these rules and forms do not take into account anachronism, syncretism and allegory. Those who expect to find in the trilogy an illustrative representation of Chilean history between 1973 and 1988 may be disappointed.¹ But the director’s choice to adopt an oblique perspective on Chilean history corresponds to the capillary and multiple nature of historical events, which make any “realistic” reconstruction impossible.

The main hypothesis of this article is that Larraín’s “Chilean dictatorship trilogy” – *Tony Manero* (2008), *Santiago 73, Post Mortem* (2010), and *No* (2012) – must be conceived of as a “theoretical work” inspired by historical facts. Beyond historiographical, sociological and philosophical theories themselves, films of this kind need to be analysed as “thought forms.”² All three films show the “true events” that happened during the Pinochet regime, but – through the narrative and expressive tools of cinema – also conceive and develop an idea of the dictatorship and its political mechanisms. Starting from these premises, it seems possible to attribute to Larraín’s films the status of cultural testimony: a testimony that leads to critical reflection on Chilean history and memory between 1973 and 1988, and even into the twenty-first century. This article focuses on the last film in the trilogy, dedicated to the 1988 Chilean national plebiscite and the communication battle between supporters of the “Yes” and “No” sides. First of all, it is necessary to contextualize *No* within the trilogy. The first section describes the similarities and differences of the characters and the spaces distinctive to each film. It gives particular relevance to Michel Foucault’s concepts of “heterotopia” and “utopia,” which enable us to understand the passage from the dictatorial regime to democracy. The article then investigates the choice of identifying the copywriter René Saavedra as the main character in *No* and the use of massive archival footage showing 1988 political communication within this fictional film. The intention of my analysis is to show the process of building a new social aesthetics, conceived according to the commercial television imagery of the 1980s, which reflects the historical conditions of the political transition.

1 For a critique of the conception of history in Larraín’s cinema, see Santa Cruz Grau (2014) and Rother (2013).

2 On the concept of the “theoretical object” in the field of image theory, see Bois, Hollier, Krauss, Damisch (1998). On film as an autonomous thought form, see Deleuze (1989), Rancière (2006), and Badiou (2013). Located between film theory and image theory, see Casetti (2008) on the concept of “theoretical work.”

The third section examines in depth the fictional representation of the 1988 campaign and proposes a dialogue with research from the social sciences that has focused on the social and political implications of the Chilean national plebiscite. While keeping in mind the *mise en scene* and editing strategies that characterize *No*, the article introduces the concepts of “videocracy” and “bioaesthetics” in order to explicate the postdictatorial political scenario that is consciously described by the film.

Finally, the fourth section thematises the so-called post-memory point of view – and hence the role played by the director himself and the younger generation in the traumatic events that marked the history of Chile and South America during the twentieth century. In particular, the text analyses the specific construction of the final part of the film. In one of the last sequences, the copywriter, the hero of the plebiscite, apparently rejects the glory of victory. These sequences, in which René adopts a sombre and reflective attitude, invite the spectator to reflect on the political condition of Chile after the dictatorship, in the context of the democratic present, characterized by the suppression of the traumatic past and the on-going persistence of social injustice.

Over the past few decades “intermediality” has emerged internationally as one of the most important concepts in film and media studies.³ Instead of attempting a general contextualization or broad reconstruction of such a complex and vast theoretical topic, the article aims at observing how intermediality works in one very specific film. In order to address the issues we have described above concerning *No* and the representation of the 1988 plebiscite, it is therefore necessary to focus on intermediality in terms of the “intermedial montage” (Montani 2010; Zucconi 2013) of different archival and fictional images. Analysing a “theoretical work” like *No* is therefore an opportunity to observe the ability of the film to hold, rework, and expose the social discourses and forms of life that characterise a historical period. What emerges is the ability of cinema to go beyond itself – in other words, to think critically about the world – just as it reflects on itself. It is in the liminal space between one image and another, as well as in the gap between the archival documents and the fictional *mise-en-scène*, that we recognise the theoretical depth distinguishing *No* and the whole trilogy.

3 See: Gaudreault and Marion (2002), Rajewsky (2005), Peucker (2007), Schröter (2011), Pethő (2011).

Looking for the Way Out. Heterotopies of Dictatorship

All the protagonists of Pablo Larraín's dictatorship trilogy are lonely men. Mario Cornejo – the main character in *Santiago 73* – has a good government job and no social relations; he tries to escape from daily life by going to the theatre and looking for an unusual encounter with his neighbour Nancy, a dancer. Raúl Peralta – the protagonist of *Tony Manero* – is a performer in a dance company located in a run-down club in Santiago; he goes in and out of the movie theatres of the city, where he identifies himself with the main character of the cult movie *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977). René Saavedra and Luis Guzmán are both copywriters, working together for the same advertising agency, who eventually come to occupy rival positions in the propaganda surrounding the 1988 Chilean plebiscite.

All of these characters live in bourgeois, proletarian or subproletarian apartments, at a very low level. They go out into the street with wary attitudes and they yearn to enter a theatre as soon as possible. They look for a way out, a path that can lead to the outside, towards a nonhomogeneous space and time. Larraín's historical and political cinema observes the characters in their attempts, always failed, to definitively escape the everyday experience of dictatorship through access to *heterotopic* spaces, such as theatre halls. As in Foucault's description, these spaces "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (1986, 24). The different characters can access spaces such as cinemas, theatres and television studios by entering through a doorway, paying for a ticket or taking out a subscription, fully aware that the entry promises a way out and therefore a return to the spaces and times of social life.

Thus, in *Santiago 73* theatrical entertainment seems to trigger a happy period in the life of Mario marked by the encounter with his neighbour, but the violence of the *coup d'état* of September 11th prevails over everything else, provoking extreme feelings in the protagonist and extreme actions: namely revenge and the lust for oblivion. Likewise, in *Tony Manero* Raúl attempts to lengthen the cinematic experience beyond the limits of the screening, but he ends up renouncing all other interests. He consequently takes heinous actions in order to cultivate his obsession in a country traumatized by state violence. As they choose heterotopy, these characters cannot escape the dictatorial *dispositif* that marked Chilean history for more than 20 years. After all, the heterotopic space is "connected with all the sites of the city, state or society or village" (1986, 25).

If the first two films of the trilogy express the impossibility of extending the domain of the imaginary over the well-defined spectatorial spaces, the third seems to focus on the difference between a heterotopic temporary escape from dictatorship and the lasting change ensured by a possible utopia [Figs. 1–2]. As Foucault wrote in the opening pages of one of his most famous books, “*Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things” (2002, xviii). By contrast, “*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical” (2002, xviii).

Santiago 73 and *Tony Manero* therefore deal with the impossibility of harmoniously articulating the passage between the topical space – to be here, in history – and the heterotopic space – to take place, provisionally, in an elsewhere – and in doing so they show the sense of waste as well as the verbal tics and postural disorders that assail the subjects. Instead of presenting a single man who enters a theatre in order to escape from reality, *No* follows two men who are building a utopian imaginary that is accessible nationwide: a wonderful Chile that will be able to accommodate everyone and no one. Following Luis, and especially René – no longer two desperate spectators but two professionals who work with images – *No* reflects, and invites us to reflect on the social conditions as well as on the cultural and political implications of the way out from the dictatorship.

By setting out in the footsteps of the copywriter figure it therefore becomes possible to conceive of the battle of images as an experiment of social values and a political way of shaping the democratic transition.

Building the Rainbow

No was inspired by the theatrical performance *El plebiscito* written by Chilean playwright Antonio Skármeta, a former member of the *Movimiento de Acción Popular y Unitaria*, who was exiled after the putsch. Larraín and the screenwriter Pedro Peirano began working on the film in 2010. From the very beginning, the director decided to shoot it in 4:3 format, using the original U-Matic cameras from the 1980s so as to interlace the visual components of the fictional scenes with

the photographic “grain” of the television archival footage that was incorporated into the movie. “I grew up in the 1980s, during the dictatorship,” the director stated after the film’s release. “What I saw on television was a low-definition, dirty imagery that you could not reproduce cleanly. The collective memory is full of darkness and impurity.”⁴

Thus the director aims to reproduce the low-resolution, dirty imagery that, according to Marshall McLuhan (1964), characterizes television as a “cool medium.”⁵ Such dirty images are the ones seen by René Saavedra – the protagonist of the last film in the trilogy – when he is invited to express a strategic assessment of the video produced by members of the Committee for the “No” side, to be screened during a 15-minute slot each day (as permitted by the regime in the days before the plebiscite).

In one sequence in the film, a transition intervenes when an umpteenth act of violence is perpetrated by the military against the demonstrators. This transition articulates the passage from document to fiction and from full-screen archival image to a TV set that is reproducing the video for the fictional anti-Pinochet militants [Figs. 3–4]. The first propaganda video against Pinochet that is shown in Larraín’s film is the only one that has been reconstructed *ex post* by the director himself, on the basis of the testimonies of people who conceived the “No” campaign.⁶ This video bases its communication effectiveness on the self-evident truth of the violence perpetrated by the Pinochet regime. It resorts to the impressive power of numbers: “34,690 tortured. NO;” “200,000 exiles. NO;” “2,110 killings. NO;” “1,248 disappeared. NO.” It demonizes the geometric rigour of military parades and exalts the spontaneous aggregation of people.

“Is that all there is?” René asks the militants from the “No” side. It is a very naive, cynical, and provocative question. The copywriter suggests “something lighter,” “a little more enjoyable.” Is the goal of the communication to win the plebiscite, or to take the opportunity to bear witness to, and create public awareness of, the violence of the dictatorship? Through these questions, there emerges the ability of the young copywriter to compromise between the representatives of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*, which gathers together the majority of the opposition parties. René aspires to achieve communication targets – above all, to reassure and bring to his side the undecided – even at the price of

4 See: <http://www.latercera.com/noticia/cultura/2012/05/1453-461597-9-pelicula-chilena-sobre-el-plebiscito-de-1988-es-aclamada-en-cannes.shtml>. Last accessed 06. 01. 2015.

5 For a rethinking of McLuhan’s typology relating to the new millenium mediatic forms, see Casetti and Somaini (2013), and Casetti (2015).

6 See the director’s declarations (Solis 2013).

neglecting the need for truth and repressing the desire to show the “true face” of Pinochet for the first time, on the TV screen.

To develop the new contents of the videos, René organizes a creative meeting with internationally experienced staff. The crucial idea is that since Pinochet himself is trying to take over the idea of democracy, the opposition must also reclaim the concept and design it as a commercial product. Rather than looking to the traumatic past, the democratic future of Chile must be represented through images of happiness, such as the spring, festivities, the calm after the storm, the colours of the rainbow, and so on. Therefore, by editing together a series of pop images – as a utopian transfiguration of Chile’s desire for justice and freedom – the rhetoric of “No” expresses a euphoric and positive attitude [Figs. 5–6]. It says an enthusiastic “Yes” to the future. Against those who conceived the 15 daily minutes of television offered to the opposition as an opportunity to reveal the “truth” of the dictatorship, René opposes happy images able to fully coincide with the Western consumer society imagination of the 1980s.

Despite the fierce criticism from the most intransigent members of the “No” side after the presentation of the teaser, René carries on his project and progressively involves an increasing number of artists and citizens. These are the most choral sequences of the film, in which the opposition’s ability to reactivate the different creative skills that have been suppressed during the 15 years of dictatorship is shown. One can refer here to the aesthetic of the “Neo-Baroque” (Calabrese 1992) or *Neobarroco* – using the Spanish word that has led to the global success of this term – to describe the “No” campaign. It thus appears fragmentary, many-sided and playful, and it grows beyond a static conception of genres and formats as well as rejecting the separation between “high culture” and “low culture.” The *pastiche* form, which structures each 15-minute episode of the campaign, makes it possible to accept requests from certain *Concertación* members to insert various kinds of engaged content within René’s frivolous communication frame: above all, the video dedicated to the mothers of *desaparecidos* and the *Doña Yolita* spot [Figs. 7–8], which focuses on the economic crisis and social injustice in the country.⁷

As shown in Larraín’s film, during the second half of the 1980s the importance of the collective imagination was no longer circumscribable within the heterotopic experience of the spectatorship of a movie theatre in which the spectators watched *Saturday Night Fever* or something else. Time passed, and even in Chile the 1980s presented the characteristics of the “postmodern condition” (Lyotard 1979). The domain of mass media aesthetics influenced lifestyles, while a new

7 For an analysis of the original “No” campaign, see Piñuel Raigada (1992) and Hirmas (1993).

global taste was about to become hegemonic. The Milton Friedman and “Chicago Boys” project that had made Pinochet’s Chile a neoliberalist experiment needed a global re-launch.⁸ It was time for “democracy” to be – as in Foucault’s terms – a utopian, “comforting, wonderful, smooth” transfiguration of social reality. This means a model of reality capable of addressing social and individual lives.

After the socialist politics and culture of Salvador Allende and after the rise to power of the pro-US dictatorial government of Pinochet, the *Concertación por la Democracia de Partidos*’ creative staff articulated a new stage in the relationship between forms of collective consciousness and forms of government. This can be considered a new formulation of Walter Benjamin’s idea of the “spectacularisation of politics” (1973). In this sense the “*pueblo unido*” sung by Inti-Illimani must be reconceived in terms of “people” and “pop.” The “No” campaign thus appears as the laboratory for a new social aesthetics.

Marketing Democracy

The intermedial montage proposed by Larraín’s film articulates the relationship between the archival materials and fiction and between the present and the past. Consequently, it questions the utopian, euphoric image of Chile associated with the “No” campaign, and by doing so invites the spectator to reflect on the unfulfilled promises and long-term consequences of the new imaginary. It shows that the only way to create a utopia is to create a “degenerated utopia” (Marin 1984) as a kind of hyperbolic transfiguration of the ideologies that structure a society at a certain moment in history, and which, as such, are subject to the consumption of time.

In particular, in one of the sequences showing the process of artistic creation of the new social aesthetic, Larraín combines archival images of the young artists Tita Parra, Cecilia Echenique and Tati Penna singing Isabel Parra’s song *No lo quiero No*, *No* with other shots showing René and the other characters in the film coordinating the same group of singers, who now appear older, however, than in the archival images. The idea of shooting *No* with U-Matic tape helps to reduce the contrast between the real historical images and the staged ones. Despite this, spectators who watch this sequence can perceive a slight chromatic and temporal difference that becomes more accentuated when they are able to recognize in the fictional part the singers Tita Parra, Cecilia Echenique and Tati Penna standing in front of René – 24 years older than they were in the original movie [Figs. 9–10].

8 On neoliberalism and social transformation in Chile, see Taylor (2004) and Winn (2004).

The same choice is repeated with some other public characters who took part in the 1988 campaign and agreed to interpret themselves 24 years later in the fictional movie.

The recording of Patricio Aylwin's speech is emblematic in this regard. The sequence shows an elderly man, corresponding to the Christian Democratic-oriented politician who presided over the transition process as Chile's First Minister between 1990 and 1994. He enters the production studio and sits down after having approached René. A reverse shot shows René's troupe and then a shot from behind the television operator. With a slow movement, the camera goes back to the machinist and when the speech starts – "*Los demócratas trabajamos a la luz del día...*" – it sinks down and shows a spy monitor. The image shown by this monitor is only indirectly compatible with what is actually framed by the camera. It consists in the original recording of the speech that Aylwin gave as the spokesperson of *Concertación* in 1988 [Figs. 11–12].

Why does Larraín's film combine the image of the old ex-President, who appears as an "actor" in the fictional film of 2012, with the original document of his own speech from 1988? Does this sort of combination between fiction and the media archive – as well as between the actor and the public figure – represent a cinematic celebration of those involved in the 1988 campaign? Does it have another meaning? The impression is that by making a comparison between the archival images and their cinematic reproduction⁹ Larraín is attempting to thematise the inner anachronism encrusted in every historical narration. Furthermore, the *mise-en-scène* and the editing aim at the production of anachronistic articulations and "dialectic images."¹⁰ It is the present that poses the conditions under which we can look back to the past and it is precisely from the present historical coordinates that it becomes possible to ask new questions about history, as well as to glimpse the "visual symptoms" (Didi-Huberman 2005) of social and cultural dynamics and long-term policies.

On the one hand, the President's cameo is an expression of a willingness to play with his own public image, as Larraín's intention is to involve the protagonists of this historical moment directly in the production of his film. But on the other hand, it is inevitable that we find in this sequence the sign of critical reflection. The double figure of Patricio Aylwin, who is at the same time a media document and an actor, corresponds to the spokesperson of the liberation political front that

9 On the different forms of archival footage remediation within the fictional film, see Dinoi (2008, 176–192).

10 On the writing of history in terms of the production of "dialectical images," see Benjamin (1973).

identifies itself with the rainbow symbol, but he is also the first Chilean president after the dictatorship. He personifies the end of the Pinochet dictatorship and at the same time he expresses the disillusionments encrusted in the democratic transition, namely the irrelevant outcome of the “Commission for Truth and Reconciliation,” the recovery of the neoliberal model, and the persistence of an acute economic disparity. In other words, he stands for the failure to achieve utopia.

Through the intermedial montage of the different pieces of archival footage, Larraín’s film tells us about a communicative battle and takes into account its immediate result – the winning of the “No” with 55.99% of the votes – as a medium-term consequence. The film does not limit itself to celebrating the heroic mission of those who have overthrown a cruel regime thanks to the power of creativity: it also takes a stand in this and leads us to reflect on the transition from a dictatorial neoliberalism to a democratic one – that is, on the ability to gain international consensus through the mass media.¹¹

In contrast to the heterotopic evasion in cinemas and theatres during the dictatorship that featured in the lives of the main characters in *Tony Manero* and *Santiago 73*, *No* presents the utopian exaltation of social life. With Chile’s turnabout in 1988, the country started a hard and difficult process towards democracy, but the close encounter with Western commercial television imagery was instead easy and immediate. With the aim of highlighting the evolution of the relationship between the entertainment machine and social life, in his 2012 film Larraín inserts archival footage that shows the American actors Jane Fonda, Richard Dreyfuss and Christopher Reeve (alias Superman) endorsing the “No” movement [Fig. 13]. Whilst the dictatorship – supported by the alliance between the Chilean Right party and the army – was a political model that responded to the hegemony of the United States in South America, by the end of the 1980s the changeover toward “soft power” was complete. This meant the establishment of a paradigm of governance that is able to grasp the imaginary realm so as to facilitate a specific visual culture as a form of control and orientation.

In the case of a director like Larraín – who, in *The Club* (2015), dares to deal with the relationship between religion, ethics and law – one might justifiably draw on the concept of “iconocracy” formulated by the French philosopher Marie-José Mondzain (2004) in her research into the Byzantine origin of the contemporary imaginary. Or more simply, one might refer to the idea of “videocracy” in order to visualize the critical aspects encrusted in the political and communicative vision produced by René’s staff and its contextual frame in the autumn of 1988. This

11 On this point, see the analysis by Benson-Allott (2013).

makes it possible to perceive the risk of the strategic communicative machine becoming impossible to stop once it was mobilized during the plebiscite. It would go on to become a form of governance in a state asset that still lacked a solid structure and a democratic balance in its institutions.¹² Furthermore, taking from the work of Julia Paley (2001), inspired by the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Foucault, one might call on the concept of a *marketing democracy*, which refers to a double process, both political and economic, that has pervaded the Chilean social imaginary since the 1980s. A more critical aspect in Larraín's film, as we will see in more detail below, is precisely his focus on communication as the most important way of obtaining consensus, as well as his focus on the embodiment of a national political fight, represented by the opposition between René and Luis. Indirectly and in retrospect, the copywriter is allowed to assume a decisive role in the new political and economic model. In such a model, as a marketing campaign supporting foreign investments claims, "Chile is no longer just a nation. It represents a new international opportunity" (Paley 2001, 117).

More generally speaking, by rethinking the role played by the entertainment machine in films such as *Tony Manero*, *Post Mortem*, and obviously *No*, it is possible to argue that the Chilean trilogy represents a reflection on the conservation of power and the social order through the deliberate use of violence by Pinochet but also, and above all, on the establishment of new governance models based on the control of imagery. One can speak in terms of "bioaesthetics" – understood in its more negative meaning – as a media technique and a discursive strategy oriented towards directing desires, shaping lifestyles, limiting the dialectical articulation of common sense thought, and anesthetizing the spectator. It thus performs a "regression of feeling in sense – and dries the emotional and cognitive processes – that differentiate the perception from the sense" (Montani 2007, 94–95).

Staying with Larraín's narrative of the plebiscite, the "No" campaign presented the conditions for an encounter between politics, aesthetics and life. At the same time, the mitigation of the role of the traumatic past assumes a programmatic aspect. After all, as Nelly Richard (1998) and Macarena Gómez-Barris (2009) have noted in their investigation of Chile's political and social issues in the 1980s and 1990s, the so-called democratic transition was only possible on the hard condition of freezing any social demands related to the traumatic memory of the dictatorship. Before bowing out, in the middle of the democratic transition, Pinochet would have had the possibility to conserve positions of power for

12 On the relationship between forms of government and forms of representation, see Debray (1993).

himself and his “lieutenants.” After the plebiscite, the governments of Aylwin and Eduardo Ruiz-Tagle mostly avoided any possible tension with the armed forces. After the dictator’s death and until the Socialist Government of Michelle Bachelet, the traumatic memory of dictatorship mostly remained latent in public policies and debates.¹³

By the same token, the memory of the political laboratory of socialism drastically interrupted by the putsch of 1973 seems to find only a small space in René Saavedra’s campaign for the “No” side. Like many scholars and intellectuals, in his film Larraín invites viewers to reflect on this blank. Salvador Allende’s democratic socialism thus remains one of many broken paths of South American history in the twentieth-century.

Post-Memory Montage

The last film in the Chilean trilogy makes extensive use of archival images. Furthermore, through its use of 1980s video techniques *No* is a film that, through “camouflage methods,” presents itself as an historical document. This strategy by the Chilean director was targeted by several critics in Chile and abroad. The idea of conducting a critical reflection by focusing on the movement for “No” – namely, the movement that was on the “right side” of history – spurred some detractors to attack the director’s family origins. Pablo Larraín is the son of Hernán Larraín and Magdalena Matte, famous representatives of the right-wing party *Unión Demócrata Independiente*, created in 1983.

While many protagonists of the events that took place in autumn 1988 agreed to take part in the film, Genaro Arriagada, executive director of the “No” campaign and historical alter ego of the fictional character, criticized the importance that Larraín assigned to communication in enabling social and political transformation. Above all, he denied the rigid opposition between the vindicated demands of the radical parties and the strategies of the copywriters. Arriagada contested the idea that “There was a group of antiqued and ideologized politicians and suddenly a new copywriter had appeared saying: ‘This is what you must do.’”¹⁴

Broadly speaking, other critics have focused on Larraín’s decision to shoot with U-Matic film and, consequently, on the risk of blurring the distinction between fiction and reality as well as that between historical events and their manipulation

13 On the public space assigned to the traumatic memory during the phase of transition, see Violi (2014).

14 See: <http://www.quepasa.cl/articulo/politica/2012/08/19-9152-9-el-no-de-arriagada.shtml>. Last accessed: 06. 01.15.

– especially for new generations who did not experience those events. “To what extent can a filmmaker selectively condense and simplify complicated true events and still claim to have made a work faithful to what really happened?” – Larry Rohter (2013) asked in the *New York Times* article that summarizes the most relevant criticisms directed against Larraín. A question of this sort posed by an American journalist echoes the myth of historical accuracy and the ideology of mirroring that an entire century of film theory has tried to deconstruct.

Even if Larraín’s film denies the rigid opposition between archival truth and fiction, it continues to reflect on the role of images as “cultural objects”: the *cause* and *effect* of social phenomena. Instead of reproducing the “postmodern” self-reflexive tendency of the seventh art, this film aims to highlight the problematic relationship between images and power as one of the main drivers of the new global governance. Beyond the category of authenticity and fidelity to historical events, Larraín’s film enacts a process of intermedial “authentication” (Montani 2010) with regard to the media documents of a past that otherwise risks being gradually relegated to oblivion or becoming obscure and of no interest to new generations (as in the case of Pinochet’s dictatorial apparatus), or that even risks continuously reproducing itself (as in the case of the marketing machine). No achieves this through the intermedial montage of historical documents and fictional images, which leads the audience to take them seriously and to evaluate both their effectiveness and their capacity to transform. The film thus offers us the chance to think about the ways through which social discourses mediate, articulate and orient forms of belief and forms of life, and shared images of reality.

In the last part of the film, when all the members of *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* share the joy of victory, René – the intradiegetic director for the whole duration of the movie – seems to be detached. Rather than the protagonist and the campaign leader, he becomes a secondary spectator who observes reality as if it was an image. The camera frames him from behind, as a kind of silhouette that stands out, backlit by the images of the victory. Then the camera follows him while he passes behind all the spotlights and the television operators, who are busy working [Fig. 14].

Unexpectedly, in the sequence of the celebration René assumes a very particular posture, similar to the attitudes embodied by the protagonists of *Santiago 73* and *Tony Manero*. He walks alone amongst the exultant crowd and the images of the politicians that mill around the “No” general quarter. The very moment the utopia becomes real, he seems to experience a sort of heterotopic space. He feels and makes the spectator feel the threshold between Foucault’s “words and

things.” But unlike Mario and Raúl, who seem to succumb to the dictatorship by consciously giving up on observing everyday reality, René recreates the testimonial potential of the heterotopic experience. He moves amongst the limits that divide different social spaces, political discourses, and mediatic genres, and by doing so he finally gets to take on the position of witness that the protagonists of Larraín’s previous films had left vacant.

One might wonder if the Larraín trilogy is just thematizing itself with this final sequence. Do the *No* fictional images really detach themselves from the archival repertoire to which they had belonged until then? In other words, does the film – completed more than 20 years after the plebiscite of 1988 – make it possible to match the historical point of view represented by René, and the posthumous one held by Larraín himself? Is this the new generation’s critical point of view embodied by Simon – René’s scared, blonde son whom he carries amongst the exultant crowd – which is able to interpret retrospectively the turning point that took place in 1988? Or is the film’s perspective that of René, who walks away and casts a critical eye over the utopia that he has created by his own hands?

One could argue that it is only the “post-memory” (Hirsch 2012) point of view of those – like the director, born in 1976 and educated during the democratic transition – who did not experience the shock of September 11, 1973 who can express these events in an original and narrative way. Or maybe it is the same copywriter who is able to recognize the risk of the social and political results of his own campaigns. The great communicator is able to deconstruct the utopia at the same time as he presents it in its seductive form. There is no need for him to wait for history to come. Teary eyes and a veiled smile seem to appear in the face of the 1980s copywriter. This is probably due to his awareness that the development of social aesthetics is a risky business, consisting of continuous negotiations between the need for justice and social peace, between the reasons for memory and the desire for oblivion. It is also due to an awareness that the future is a construction and a projection, as well as an easy lever for propagandist speeches. But it is also the historical place of judgement for the acts and political choices that inevitably take shape in the present.

By making a copywriter the protagonist of the film, an awareness of the importance assumed by the mass media in social and political life, and in the turning points of history, becomes possible. By conceiving of the political battle as a battle of communication, Larraín not only tells the story of a success and its corresponding feeling of euphoria, he also proposes a critical survey of the hopes and prophecies that made the 1980s so important, in both South America and

Europe. He shows the confidence in the development of a new political, social and aesthetic feeling that is open to “difference” and capable of overcoming the political authoritarianism that characterized the previous decades. At the same time, he invites spectators to reflect on the complex relationship between images and power, so as to assume a critical attitude towards history and perhaps to take a political position concerning their present and future.

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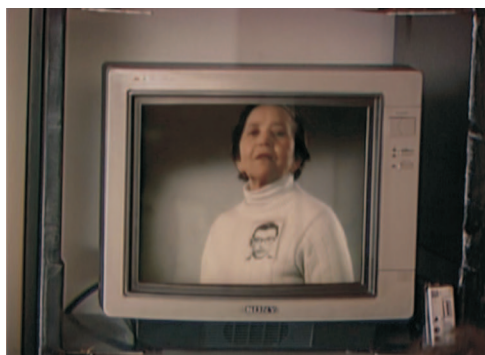
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