

**País de Ganadores: Tracing the Roots of Neoliberal Propaganda from
Chile's Sí Campaign to *Iron Man***

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“...I personally guarantee you, the bad guys won't even want to come out of their caves.”¹

- Tony Stark, a.k.a. Iron Man, demonstrating the Jericho missile to US generals

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Introduction: Plebiscites and Profit Margins

(Two Models of Voting)

Chile: 1988. Fifteen years after a military coup that resulted in the death of democratically-elected socialist Salvador Allende, Augusto Pinochet's right-wing military dictatorship faced increasing opposition to its rule from a strengthening political base of domestic opposition, pressure from abroad, and antigovernment violence from leftist militant groups. As the dictatorship continued to blend the disappearance, torture and murder of political dissidents with a sweeping program of economic deregulation spearheaded by a group of US-trained economists known as the 'Chicago Boys,' the regime's legacy in this historic moment was exceptionally complicated.

In the face of increasing challenges to its legitimacy, the dictatorship attempted to brand itself as a democratic institution with broad popular support in order to appease its domestic and foreign critics. A plebiscite had been planned for the year of 1988 in the 1980 Constitution, in which voters would be given the option of voting 'Sí' [Yes] to a candidate selected by the military junta, who would then serve as president for another eight years, or a 'No' vote, which would end the reign of the military dictatorship within the year and open up democratic elections. Pinochet himself would soon claim candidacy under the Sí option. As a concession to the officially-recognized opposition—the Concertación de Partidos por el No, a broad coalition

¹ *Iron Man*, directed by Jon Favreau (2008; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2008). DVD. (15:10)

of parties across the political spectrum pushing for open elections—the dictatorship created half-hour dedicated periods of television programming, or ‘franjas,’ for political advertisements, to run from 10:45 P.M. to 11:15 P.M. during the week and from 12:00 noon to 12:30 P.M. on the weekends leading up to the election—fifteen minutes for the Sí campaign and fifteen for the opposition to present the case for ‘No.’² These franjas ran daily for a month until the night before the plebiscite, which took place on October 5th.

This barely substantial concession to the opposition turned out to be a mistake. When the Concertación teamed up with local advertising talents to produce a high-quality, highly successful No campaign, the dictatorship was caught completely off-guard. In response to this unexpected challenge, Pinochet’s advertising teams adapted rapidly, employing a variety of tactics in defense of his continued rule. Most scholarship on the Sí franja simply condemns it as a failure and moves on to the successful tactics of the undeniably more sophisticated No campaign. Despite its failure, the franja remains a compelling object for study due the role it was rapidly forced to adopt leading up to the plebiscite. Under pressure from the opposition, its advertising spots become the setting for a dictatorship’s attempts to define and defend its own legacy in real time.

Two decades later, Pinochet is no longer in power. In his absence, however, the succession of democratic governments that followed—with candidates from the Christian Democrats, Socialists, and right-wing coalition Alliance for Progress trading four-year stints in the presidential seat—have continued the dictatorship’s experiments with economic deregulation following a neoliberal model, and the country that trained the Chicago Boys has adopted many of their principles as well. The markets of Chile and the United States are becoming more closely

² María Eugenia Hirmas, “The Chilean Case: Television in the 1988 Plebiscite,” *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*. ed. Thomas E. Skidmore (Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Washington, D.C., 1993). 82.

linked in an era where ‘globalization’ and ‘free trade’ are the dominant buzzwords, a trend which will likely continue with the signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a sweeping free trade agreement spearheaded by the US which includes both nations, as well as a shifting bloc of others as treaty negotiations progress behind closed doors. One ever-important area of trade in an increasingly global world is entertainment, and film provides an interesting example; Hollywood films are packaged for export to an extreme degree. Superhero movies, especially from the last few years, are some of the most lucrative of these border-crossing blockbusters. *Iron Man 3* (2013), for example, added scenes exclusively for the Chinese theatrical release of the film. In Chile, Tony Stark’s exploits play out in living rooms, bar televisions, and inter-city buses in all corners of the country.

As an art form with an increasingly global reach, the superhero blockbuster is capable of interacting with multiple cultural contexts simultaneously. These films may cross borders, but they come into being in Hollywood, whose films generally reference an American experience. Hollywood’s superhero renaissance of the past few years, which seems to have successfully mainstreamed the characters of once-niche media, runs concurrently with a distinct era in the national consciousness. As of this writing, the United States has been engaged in a War on Terror for well over a decade, launching various campaigns and actions around the globe—most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the domestic level, the post-9/11 era has seen a significant increase in state power and a variety of legally-sanctioned intrusions on individual rights in the name of safety and national security.

It is in this setting that the Hollywood superhero blockbuster draws in millions of dollars of profit both domestically and overseas. The country that produces these films is a country at war. So in what ways is the new superhero—far from simply an American hero—a hero of the

post-9/11 world? Few of these films directly address global terrorism or the status of the US as a nation at war, but the few explicit or implicit references to global conflict are striking. Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* (2008) is one of the most explicit examples, pitting Tony Stark and his high-tech, weaponized suit against a shadowy, transnational force of militants based in Afghanistan known as the Ten Rings, which serves as a stand-in for Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda or al-Shabab.

Why read *Iron Man* side-by-side with Pinochetista propaganda from the late 1980s? Both the *Sí* franja and the Hollywood superhero blockbuster are examples of media with broad reach in the countries that produce them, and, despite the decades that separate them, both emerge in countries embroiled in state violence. The Chilean dictatorship's attempt to define its own legacy demonstrates an apparent reluctance to acknowledge the role of detention, torture and disappearance of dissidents in the government program—the primary narrative here is one of economic victory, stressing Chile's growth during the period and the accomplishments of the government since the Allende years. In *Iron Man*'s foray into War on Terror-era superheroism, we see the titular character in combat against terrorist groups and the corrupt businessmen who sell them weapons, but the role of the US military in this global war seems intentionally minimized. The role of these respective silences is interesting because they downplay the concept of authority structures as perpetrators of violence, thus in a way accepting the actions of the state in a moment of de facto war.

Another fascinating intersection between the *Sí* campaign and films like *Iron Man* is their respective positioning in history; each marks a distinct point in the gestation and cultural justification of an increasingly global economic system based on neoliberal models. The Chilean government's adoption of such models throughout the dictatorship period coincides with a period

of cultural change, which its propagandists attempt to outline and celebrate. In the *Sí* franja's various spots, ideas of what ideal and non-ideal citizenships mean or look like in the new social-political climate, as well as an attempt to articulate this climate, are implicitly explored. To read these portraits of ideal citizenship alongside portrayals of contemporary heroism in films like *Iron Man*—which not only offers a model of ideal citizenship through victory but a framework for reality in which this heroism ensures success—sheds light on the germ of the same heroic models that produce millions of dollars in profits in the United States and Chile alike. In reading these sources side-by-side, I aim to suggest that the cinematic and storytelling techniques with which America currently defines a global hero had already started to develop organically, as an early wave of neoliberal regimes attempted to identify acceptable and unacceptable forms of civic engagement under a new and evolving status quo. Put more explicitly, the tactics employed by the *Sí* campaign in order to characterize Chilean society directly prefigure or predict the implicit ideological frameworks functioning overtly or covertly in *Iron Man*. This paper is the story of an ideology's decades-long struggle to establish and defend its legitimacy, and the culmination of these efforts in a global entertainment complex—the transmission of the hero to a new age.

The ideologies that long for that impossible clean slate, which can be reached only through some kind of cataclysm, are the dangerous ones.³

- Naomi Klein, from *The Shock Doctrine*

Tony Stark as Robot Octopus – Mutabilities of Hero and Plot in Jon Favreau’s *Iron Man*

Halfway through *Iron Man*, Tony Stark calls his assistant, Pepper Potts, down to his office/personal laboratory. She finds him on an operating table, where he’s attempting to exchange the reactor in his chest—which normally powers a magnet to keep shrapnel from a prior bomb explosion from reaching his heart—with a newer, more powerful model, as well as remove a wire which was causing a short circuit. After the wire touches the socket wall with an Operation-like shock sound effect, Pepper accidentally removes a magnet, Tony almost goes into cardiac arrest, and then Pepper reconnects the new reactor with another buzz and yelp from Tony—a regular comedy of errors. When Tony tries to laugh it off, Pepper smiles for a second, but tells him not to “ever, ever, ever, *ever* ask me to do anything like that ever again.” An uncomfortable-looking Tony responds that “I don’t have anyone but you,” before rapidly changing the subject.⁴

This ‘moment of weakness’ is interesting in its depiction of a hero much more comfortable mowing down caverns full of terrorists than simply asking for help. Why is Stark-as-hero disconnected from almost everyone around him? Conventional wisdom holds that superheroes are under constant pressure to protect their loved ones, those with whom they share close attachments. As of yet, however, Tony has not entered the public sphere as Iron Man; up to this point, the film portrays him as a detached, cynical billionaire inventor facing a change of heart after his imprisonment and escape from an Afghan terrorist camp. His isolation,

³ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 23.

⁴ *Iron Man*. (51:40)

established from the start of the film, has nothing to do with his heroism—he’s aloof from the beginning. At the same time, this pre-heroic state of disconnection from others around him is central to the concept of heroism presented in this and other films.

After the film’s initial fight scene and the revelation that Tony’s been captured by terrorists, we’re treated to an awards-show montage of his life leading up to the events of the film. Over images of Tony growing up, an enthusiastic announcer reads:

Tony Stark: visionary, genius, American patriot. Even from an early age, the son of legendary weapons developer Howard Stark quickly stole the spotlight with his brilliant and unique mind. At age four he built his own circuit board. At age six, his first engine. And at seventeen, he graduated summa cum laude from MIT...⁵

As the announcer discusses Tony’s achievements, we see a newspaper clipping from an article in which a seventeen-year old inventor poses with a “prize winning robot” that he constructed and entered into a competition.⁶ From the beginning, Stark is established as exceptional, a genius capable of constructing a variety of complex equipment on his own. As a leader in the corporate world, he emulates a self-reliant ideal which very much implies that he deserves to be where he is. He seems to excel on talent alone and has very few people he needs to answer to, a fact underlined by his absence from the room when he’s called up to accept the award, as he’s been gambling in the casino where the event is held. Tony Stark does not care; he’s as much of a rebel as he is a genius. When we see him alone, working on one of his cars, he’s even blasting the 1983 hardcore punk song “Institutionalized” by Suicidal Tendencies—at its core an expression of disaffection with society.⁷ In a sense, he could be seen as the embodiment of multiple fantasies at once; intelligent, successful, powerful, able to act on his own whims without

⁵ *ibid.* (4:18)

⁶ *ibid.* (4:45)

⁷ *ibid.* (10:31)

social stigma. Iron Man is many things to many people, even when this requires internal contradiction.

These internal contradictions are exactly why his rebellious streak cannot be seen as truly subversive. In a meditation on the role of cinema in the 21st century as well as the limitations of artistic transgression—especially in a cinematic climate where controversy can drive profits and risks losing its subversive elements—Steven Schaviro suggests that “Every act of transgression offers at least a backhanded compliment to the order, the norm, or the law that is being transgressed – since it is only the continuing power of that order, norm, or law that gives meaning to the action of defying it.”⁸ This paradox is embodied in Tony Stark as a figure; his rebellion, initially excusable due to his position of power in society—when Obadiah Staine accepts a reward for an absentee Tony, he jokes that “Tony, ya know, the best thing about Tony, is also the worst thing. He’s *always* working.”⁹ In a sense, Stark’s ill-timed betting streak is a part of his job. Though he skips his own award session, it is perfectly acceptable and expected that he would do so. The night moves on. But Obadiah’s claim that Tony is always working is truer in the film than Obadiah himself may be willing to admit—Tony’s occasional temper-tantrums or ill-timed betting streaks are not meant to distract us from the main event: his hero status. He heads an American corporation (technically through direct blood lineage but *really* through sheer raw genius), speaks an American patriotic discourse, and fights America’s enemies face-to-face. He’s mutable, but remains a hero.

Everything about Tony Stark as a character is adaptable. His heroism functions in the same way. He goes toe to toe in an argument with a journalist who considers him a “Merchant

⁸ Steven Shaviro, “Post-Cinematic Affect,” *Film-Philosophy* 14.1 (2010): 23

⁹ *Iron Man* (6:30)

of Death,” which quickly turns into a sex scene back at Tony’s apartment.¹⁰ At his first press conference after his captivity in Afghanistan, he announces that “I saw young Americans killed by my own weapons” and claims that Stark Industries will abandon future weapons production.¹¹ The tension surrounding this decision ends up supplanting the War on Terror as the central conflict of the film, though Stark starts work on the Iron Man suit (which seems to qualify as a weapon) less than fifteen film-minutes after his press conference.¹² He saves the Afghan town of Gulmira from terrorist attack and leaves the leader of the assault to community justice,¹³ but during the final fight scene with another suited industrialist, he seems to rack up significant amounts of collateral damage on a domestic freeway.¹⁴ Neither Stark’s guiding principles nor his chosen tactics are internally consistent, as the relationship between his actions and his ideology is constantly shifting. As a role model, what he seems to model above all else is a constant state of mutability. Is this mutability lazy writing, or is it what makes him most accessible as a hero?

Dan Hassler-Forest’s *Capitalist Superheroes* provides a market-based explanation of this mutability in his discussion of NBC series *Heroes* (2006-2010). Focusing on the character of Claire and the narrative’s simultaneous attentions to her as a human being with struggles as well as an objectified sex object, Hassler-Forest writes that she

...can be embraced by teenage girls as a sympathetic way of dramatizing issues they recognize and identify with, such as parental conflicts, social issues, and the character’s drive towards self-mutilation. But at the same time, her scenes can be enjoyed by male audiences as a pleasurable, heavily eroticized depiction of the culturally fetishized cheerleader sex fantasy. The series’ employment of such a diverse cast of characters in

¹⁰ *ibid.* (8:10)

¹¹ *ibid.* (45:20)

¹² *ibid.* (57:00)

¹³ *ibid.* (1:18:10)

¹⁴ *ibid.* (1:45:18)

prominent roles thereby constitutes another viable postmodern strategy of appealing directly to a large variety of individual subcultures, lifestyles, and audience groups.¹⁵

A heroic character does not need to be consistent in the way they are presented. Hassler-Forest's most interesting criticism is the claim that a character can be written to appeal to demographics rather than as a character in their own right. Indeed, they can perform a variety of contradictory roles simultaneously, depending on the practical desire to relate to one audience or another. The primary writing concern is not to display humanity in all its complexity, but to create multifaceted individuals in which each facet is a nudge to an increasingly multinational profit margin. Hassler-Forest's second point in this moment is that the "diverse cast of characters" in a show like *Heroes* echoes the audience-broadening impulse of the kind of characterization the critic sees in *Claire*. The effect is less a spectacle of interacting humans than a collective robot octopus, grasping at traits, straws, and convenient demographics.

Is Robert Downey, Jr.-as-Iron Man a robot octopus? It doesn't seem like a stretch to draw attention to his limbs. One has a swirling, chaotic grip on rebellion, another rests on the theoretical and practical genius of Nikola Tesla, while another robotic tentacle Scrooge-McDucks its way through infinite piles of coins. There's a tentacle whirring through tentative critiques of the "zero accountability" US military-industrial complex in a time of war, as another tentacle grasps the trigger of a US-produced firearm and takes aim at the heart of post-9/11 terrorism. Stark needs one to buzz through sex scenes with blonde journalists, while making sure to save a couple to clatter through a necessary romantic subplot between himself and Gwyneth Paltrow. It's too soon to tell if the octopus has a head, but we're left with at least eight limbs which give the impression of acting independently—the greatest hole in this line of

¹⁵ Dan Hassler-Forest, *Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders in the Digital Age* (Hants, UK: Zero Books, 2012): 237

reasoning might be the implication that these limbs and others eventually meet in some as-of-yet-indeterminate middle.

If the Stark figure doesn't 'make sense' as an internally consistent character, can the same be said of the world around him? How are this world and Stark's relationship to it characterized during the course of the film? Does the world around him reflect the mutability of his character? Does this mutability make it easier for him to move within this world? The first time he constructs and dons a weaponized suit is during his captivity in the Ten Rings compound, presumably in Afghanistan. Under the guise of building an advanced missile for the group, Tony instead creates the first incarnation of the Iron Man suit, which he then uses to blast his way out of the compound. Not altogether strange for an action film. That said, the whole time that Tony constructs his suit and the arc reactor to power it, the Ten Rings have him monitored on Closed-Circuit Television. Tony's captors are given every opportunity to realize what's really going on; they even grow suspicious when they catch him testing out a mechanical leg, which doesn't seem to have anything to do with the smart missile he's supposed to be building.¹⁶ The leg even prompts a visit from terrorist leader Raza and a small army of Ten Rings operatives, who call Tony's bluff, even threatening to kill his fellow prisoner Yinsen, but by telling them that "I need him" to finish the missile, he buys Yinsen's life and one more day to finish the suit.¹⁷ Raza takes Tony at his word, assumes that Tony has conceded to building the weapon he is supposed to, but at no point does he check to see if the missile's being built, or check to see what Tony's actually building. Essentially, the visit serves no purpose other than to intimidate Stark and raise the stakes—it's not a strategic response to the original problem, where the prisoner who's supposed to build a missile seems to be building something other than a

¹⁶ *Iron Man* (28:26)

¹⁷ *ibid.* (31:13)

missile. Here we witness an interesting sleight of hand on the narrative level, where the villain raises the stakes and creates dramatic tension, while still leaving the hero the necessary openings to construct his suit and launch a pyrotechnic escape.

In his essay, “Post-Cinematic Affect,” Steven Shaviro offers an interesting framework for traditional action movie plots which might be worth applying as a yardstick for how Stark’s heroism functions leading up to and during his escape. Important for Shaviro is a sort of proportionality between the situation faced by the protagonist and the action that s/he takes:

...the more onerous the dilemma faced by the protagonist, the more resourceful and impressive the action by means of which he or she resolves it. There is a smooth movement from sensory perception to motor response; a stone-faced action hero, like Clint Eastwood’s Dirty Harry, is able to remain impassive, and true to himself, because he is always able to discharge his feelings outwardly – with the help, of course, of his .44 Magnum.¹⁸

In Shaviro’s view, the traditional action hero is defined by a proportional response to any problem encountered; the stimulus, the problem faced by the hero, is met with a crude but appropriate reaction which solves the problem through the measured use of violence. Something happens, the hero reacts, the plot moves on. Does Tony demonstrate proportionality in the response to his capture? It certainly solves the immediate problem. Placed under constant surveillance, Stark’s instructed to build a missile for the Ten Rings, and builds something else instead which ultimately allows him to escape. But it would be unfair to claim that his assessment of the problem and formation of a solution is solely responsible for the success of his plan. In fact, the world *around him* adjusts to accommodate his escape strategy. The terrorists catch him, on camera, building the leg of a suit, but they don’t search for this leg when they confront him, and the confrontation does not significantly alter the terms of the problem or the feasibility of Tony’s original solution. He’s been caught building a suit, but he’s not prevented

¹⁸ Shaviro, “Post-Cinematic Affect.” 59.

from doing so. Just as the identity of Stark-as-hero is mutable, as is the logic of the world around him, which adjusts to the hero's needs. The severity of the problem meets Tony halfway, creating a kind of artificial proportionality between the circumstances and his successful response. In short? The game is rigged, and Tony's the winner.

The Iron Man suit itself functions as the ultimate trump card, planting its wearer at the center of a network of convenient mutabilities; the world operates on the logic of the hero as victor. After Tony begins his escape, nothing can stop him, to the point where his invincibility is played for laughs. As he unveils his suit and begins fighting through waves of militants, everything seems to be going well until, in the middle of a fight, he swings his arm and gets it stuck in the rock of the tunnel wall. A Ten Rings militant tentatively approaches, and takes aim at the head of the suit. When he fires, the bullet bounces off Stark's helmet, killing the firer instantly.¹⁹ This moment, played as slapstick comedy, pits Tony's world against the indestructible power of the suit. He makes a mistake; after misjudging a punch his fist ends up stuck in the wall, seemingly leaving him vulnerable. But the conditions of reality—the defensive abilities of the suit—render this mistake irrelevant, leaving a terrorist dead and providing some laughs in the process. The mistake was never a mistake, but an opportunity for a writer to set up a joke. Humor here comes coded with power, the superiority of the hero over his enemies, as well as the reality-bending privileges that the plot grants Tony.

Through much of the movie, the suit acts as mediator between hero and world; reality bends for the sake of the suit, and the suit almost guarantees the hero a proper response to whatever situation may arise. The second time that Tony battles the Ten Rings, this time in a new Iron Man suit in the Middle Eastern/Central Asian village of Gulmira, the same kind of proportionality between action and heroic reaction is maintained by the mutabilities of the suit

¹⁹ *Iron Man*. (36:58)

and the surrounding world. As Tony blasts his way through a group of militants in order to liberate a group of civilians, the remaining terrorists stall the action with a minor twist; they turn their guns on the civilians, using them as human shields and forcing an impasse. Stark pauses for a moment and watches the terrorists, and behind the mask of the suit we see his onboard computers run through the necessary calculations, one-by-one marking each civilian as a ‘CIVILIAN.’ A set of guns pops up from each shoulder of the suit and, all at once, the computer-targeted weapons execute the terrorists while leaving their human shields unharmed.²⁰ It’s a most fascinating case of wishful thinking, and one that continues age-old anxieties surrounding the distinction between good and evil. The suit can respond to the threat that the terrorists pose to the civilians by processing the situation and calculating, without error, the separation between friend and foe. In a way, the suit accomplishes what years of drone strikes have not—eliminating militants without the risk of collateral damage. But how are these calculations conducted? The fear that the terrorists, when they aren’t attacking, can effortlessly blend into the general population, are indeed indistinguishable from civilians when not attacking, is central to the common knowledge of what a 21st-century terrorist is. In one surgical stroke, the suit bridges this gap, cleanly navigating the divide between terrorist and civilian, a divide which military technology has previously been unable to negotiate. This ability of the suit to exist outside of the terms of the reality that dreamed it up effectively negates the minor twist presented by the hostage-taking militants, bending the problem to allow a rapid and effective response.

Throughout this battle scene, the structure of twist-incites-technological-response operates as the main architect and main diffuser of dramatic tension. Following the hostage scene, Tony is in mid-flight to a site where the Ten Rings have stockpiled some Stark Industries missiles when a sudden blast knocks him out of the air. He crashes to the ground in front of a

²⁰ *ibid.* (1:17:45)

tank, which fires another shot that he dodges almost effortlessly before pointing his arm at the offending vehicle—a small rocket emerges from his wrist, fires, and Tony walks away from a spectacularly exploding tank.²¹ This minor twist seems, although less subtle in its wishes than the hostage scene, to show off the same bottomless adaptability of the suit. Being shot down by a tank, rather than showing the suit's limitations, serves as an opportunity to demonstrate just how well it lends itself to destroying tanks. Again, a twist is negated by the suit's capabilities, and Stark's heroism is defined by his ability to negotiate the twist in a way that demonstrates domination of the enemy. The twists and turns of this battle reinforce his heroism rather than challenging him—they provide opportunities for Tony to win.

What kind of heroism is demonstrated by the hero who is set up to win, who demonstrates heroism by negotiating twists that aren't really twists? The article, "Gamer Theory" by McKenzie Wark provides an interesting framework for understanding these twists by teasing out ways that the logic of the video game genre may have crossed the threshold and begun interacting ideologically with real-world conditions. Among other things, he suggests that pop culture understanding of narrative has been "colonized" by ideals of victory: "Narrative is no longer a question of an imaginary reconciliation of real problems. The story just recounts the steps by which someone beat someone else – a real victory for imaginary stakes."²² Can this explain Tony Stark's—or rather, his suit's—seemingly effortless surmounting of twists that arise? Each turn creates a kind of minigame where Stark squares off against the unexpected and wins. His narrative feeds us victory after victory, demonstrating that he can come out on top every time the game resets.

²¹ *ibid.* (1:18:36)

²² McKenzie Wark, "Gamer Theory," *Cultural Politics* 2:2 (2006): 215.

The reasons for these minigames aren't always clear, and the rules of the game don't always have to make sense, but the games occur nonetheless, and it's the job of the hero to win each one in succession. Toward the end of the film, it is revealed that Stark Industries industrialist and mentor figure Obadiah Staine has been manipulating the Ten Rings behind the scenes from the beginning, selling them advanced weapons and contracting them to kill Tony during his visit to Afghanistan. The audience learns this information during a face-to-face meeting between Staine and Raza, and Tony Stark and assistant Pepper Potts learn of Staine's betrayal when Pepper finds a video from the Ten Rings buried on his computer. It seems that this video, which we see being filmed at the beginning of the movie after Stark's capture, forms a stylistic analogue to videos of captives released to the public by contemporary terrorist groups—the captive, Stark, is the initially hooded centerpiece ringed by armed, masked militants in front of a flag.²³ But when the video appears on Obadiah's computer and Pepper translates the audio from the original Urdu—by typing 'TRANSLATE' in the appropriate box, obviously²⁴—the message appears to be directed to Obadiah and Obadiah alone: "You did not tell us that the target you paid us to kill was the great Tony Stark. As you can see, Obadiah Staine, your deception and lies will cost you dearly. The price to kill Tony Stark has just gone up."²⁵ As Staine's dealings with the Ten Rings are necessarily secretive, we are to infer that this video file was not released to the broader public but to Staine alone. In this way, the translation of the Ten Rings' ultimatum generates a twist in the way the audience understands the function of the clip. Its narrative purpose is no longer to serve as a reference to al-Qaeda videos, but to further establish Staine as central villain. The drama lies in a shift from a position of 'This is what you

²³ *Iron Man* (3:54)

²⁴ In addition, the voice that comes from the computer speakers after Pepper translates the recording is Raza's voice, just as it sounds when he's speaking fluent English...magic!

²⁵ *Iron Man* (1:31:44)

thought was happening’ to ‘This is what’s *actually* happening.’ We follow the hero through a moment of shock, and watch excitedly as the consequences of that shock unravel and, at last, fuse into a resolution courtesy of the requisite explosions. We keep watching because the terms of the game have changed, and the stakes are higher—as a game character in Stark’s universe, Obadiah Staine functions like a final boss.

The hero’s eventual collision with Staine is set in motion when Pepper discovers the video implicating the industrialist, though the rapid resignification of the video raises questions. If the clip is released to Staine and Staine alone, then why doesn’t Raza, who is apparently fluent in English, address Staine directly in a common language rather than depending on Stark Industries’ abnormally effective translation software to decode his Urdu? One possible reason would be to prevent Tony from catching on that Staine has contracted the Ten Rings to kill him—though they’re already forcing him to build a missile using the threat they pose to his life as leverage, and the fact that his closest friend in the United States has turned against him could serve to enhance his dependence on his captors. So the reasoning behind the ‘translation’ of the video from Urdu to English appears to be the thrill of the shift from ‘This is what you *thought* was happening’ to ‘This is what’s *actually* happening’—it doesn’t seem like there’s any other logical basis for the video as plot-point.²⁶ This twist-in-miniature points toward an interesting idea—that in the contemporary superhero blockbuster, plot twists do not emerge organically from the plot. On the contrary, twists mark pivotal moments in the narrative and the rest of the

²⁶ The English translation given for the clip near the end of *Iron Man* seems in itself problematic. I’ve come across several entertainment sites which suggest that when we first see the Ten Rings filming Stark and delivering the speech that Pepper uses Obadiah’s software to translate later on, the words of the monologue implicate Staine and thus predict the rest of the plot. No sources are given for this claim – it’s possible that the source is the ‘translation’ provided toward the end of the film itself. When one of these entertainment articles appeared for discussion on a Reddit forum, several Urdu-speaking commenters suggested that the monologue contains no plot spoilers at all, and is instead a generic set of grievances against Tony and the West (<<http://redd.it/1for2r>>). The argument that the film deliberately mistranslates these sentences later on in order to advance the plot is a step beyond what I currently have the resources to prove, as my lack of knowledge of Urdu and a lack of scholarship on the linguistic politics of *Iron Man* both limit this line of study. That said, I wouldn’t be surprised.

plot is engineered to fit loosely around them. The only goal is excitement, the initial shock and process of resignifying and reclassifying old information to conform to a new status quo. As hero, Stark constantly relives this process on both a micro and macro scale, engaging with each mini-twist and conforming to each crisis that slips into the narrative—the experience of the audience during every twist and the constant reinterpretation and reapplication of prior information that it entails all serve as mirrors to Stark’s movements through a constantly shifting narrative.

Is the plot twist becoming more important than the plot? To what extent has plot twist evolved beyond a mere elevator of drama to become the central narrative element of the blockbuster film? In a way, extreme twists have become the norm in popular cinema, with labyrinthine, twist-driven plots resulting in some of the highest-grossing films of the past few years. Since *Iron Man*, we’ve seen cat-and-mouse games between beleaguered heroes and a villain who’s always one step ahead in high-grossing films like Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2008 and 2012 respectively), *The Avengers* (2012), and the influence of these tropes on existing franchises like James Bond—Bond’s frenetic attempts to navigate the high-stakes machinations of villain Silva’s elaborate plans in *Skyfall* (2012) both echo the Batman-Joker feud in *The Dark Knight* and perfectly demonstrate the franchise’s ability to keep up with the tastes of paying customers. While the idea of a cat and mouse game is a time-honored trope, it appears in the contemporary blockbuster in an exaggerated and hyper-visceral state which lends twist-dictated narrative a kind of thin legitimacy. It’s also possible for high-grossing films to exploit twists to the point of surrealism, a technique which feels more natural in the lucid dreamworlds of *Inception* (2010) than in the final minutes of *The Dark Knight Rises*, in which the oversaturation of last-minute twists runs the risk of unraveling the

already-loose logic of the preceding two-and-a-half hours of film. The overall effect is that, while individual plot twists may still come with a level of surprise, their saturation of popular cinema starts to mean that the action-adventure genre comes with the expectation of twist.

What do we conclude when the unexpected becomes expected? Or when the contract between media and audience shifts to a point where film agrees to keep the audience on its toes in exchange for an awestruck suspension of disbelief? In a world of increasingly-global media empires, where *Iron Man* can make it to Chile as *El hombre de hierro*, the implications of these questions are increasingly relevant. It would be unreasonable to claim that the constant instability of twist-driven narrative is an exclusively American phenomenon, and Chile provides interesting contemporary examples. The HBO Chile series, *Prófugos*²⁷ (dir. Pablo Larraín, 2011—) is a perfect example of a narrative saturated by twists and turns, to the point where surprise betrayals and sudden reversals of fortune become business as usual. The first season follows the Farragut family, leaders of a Chilean drug cartel, as well as their allies, through a breakneck roller-coaster that's both set in motion and sustained by twists; a cocaine deal in the port city of Valparaíso ends in a shootout where the protagonists come under fire from a members of the police and a rival cartel, and leaves the on the run from cops and criminals alike, making little effort to differentiate between the two as a corruption ring emerges linking key policemen to the Farraguts' rivals. Supposed allies turn on the fugitives in a heartbeat and new details from each character's past come to play in ways that constantly raise the stakes. Like in the superhero film, the narrative of *Prófugos* is addicted to twist.

What's most interesting about *Prófugos* is that its constantly-shifting world, while approaching similar territory to films like *Iron Man* in the affect it generates, is a more explicit attempt at verisimilitude than Hollywood superhero films. The series goes to great effort to film

²⁷ 'Fugitives'

on location, following its antiheroes from the Atacama Desert of Chile's north to the forests of the south. We're given glimpses at the ritziest business centers of downtown Santiago as well as neighborhoods where drug-traffickers have set up safe havens, and follow characters through urban centers and Mapuche villages alike—the diverse human geography of Chile, with urban, rural, rich, poor, colonially-descended and indigenous populations, is on display as much as the physical geography. The plot revolves around a topic of growing media attention: large-scale drug trafficking. When talking about the series, producer-director Pablo Larraín discusses *Prófugos* as rooted in current issues: “Lo que tiene esta serie es que es contemporánea y habla de cosas que están pasando hoy día, ahora, acá.”²⁸ It seems that in certain contexts, a twist-driven narrative such as that of *Prófugos* can be applied not only to primarily escapist forms of entertainment like *Iron Man*, but to narratives which attempt to engage more closely with their present contexts. If a frenetic plot in which characters are thrown into setback after setback can have a place in a more self-consciously ‘realistic’ story, then to what extent can we inch past the claim that this mode of storytelling is popular simply because it’s entertaining and suggest that it’s popular because it captures an element of the audience’s lived reality? The idea that such a narrative can be described as realistic suggests, at the very least, its institutionalization as a means of representing lived experience and the possibility of bleeding over into how the audience determines what is and what isn’t a normal affective experience with reality. Do the high-grossing, multi-film *Iron Man* franchise and *Prófugos*, now renewed for a third season, both enjoy success because of the institutionalization of twist narrative which they both exploit for entertainment purposes and reinscribe as the new normal?

²⁸ ‘The content of this series is contemporary and talks about the things that are happening today, now, right here.’ Qtd. in Carolina Urzúa, “Prófugos regresa a HBO con el estreno de su 2ª temporada.” *Guioteca*, August 23, 2013, <<http://www.guioteca.com/series-de-tv/profugos-regresa-a-hbo-con-el-estreno-de-su-2%C2%AA-temporada/>

This new normal appears increasingly accepted as a framework for the audience to process the world around them, with strong ideological implications operating covertly. For Steven Shaviro, twist-narrative appears to describe a defeatist response to the apparent determinism of global late-capitalist economics; his discussion of French thriller *Boarding Gate* (dir. Olivier Assayas, 2007) bears interesting fruit for our reading of twists in sources like *Iron Man* and *Prófugos*:

...[questions] can only be asked in the very short term: ‘what will happen to me in the next week, in the next day, in the next five minutes?’ Worrying about long-term prospects and consequences is a luxury that nobody can afford. *In a world of ‘just-in-time’ production, one cannot make more than ‘just-in-time’ plans.* One’s power to negotiate one’s circumstances is severely limited, because there is so little that one is able to know. One’s actions always have ‘unintended consequences’...²⁹

Shaviro’s assertion that ‘just-in-time’ plans are inherently linked to a climate of ‘just-in-time’ production is as descriptive of Tony Stark’s reality as it is the constant flight and rapid implosion of the Farragut cartel in *Prófugos*. The power of a constant state of unpredictability is that it threatens to decontextualize each individual challenge; the protagonist has to apply her skills and instincts to survive in an ever-shifting space where one victory over a twist may not be applicable in dealing with the next one. The beauty of the Iron Man suit is its ability to navigate these twists with ease, and the drama of *Prófugos* is the pressure that a succession of twists places on everymen and everywomen who lack Tony Stark’s cybernetic enhancements. What separates Tony from the transnational Joe or Jane is that he’s able to survive, even thrive, when faced with similar pressures.

It seems like there isn’t much that discursively separates a linear narrative, where unexpected events may intrude, from a narrative where the unexpected becomes the nonexistent anchor point around which linear narrative unravels. It’s not always clear when one form of

²⁹ Shaviro, “Post-Cinematic Affect.” 53. (*emphasis mine*)

storytelling crosses into the other. What is at stake when popular entertainment is colonized by the second, linearphobic model of narrative? The word ‘narrative’ may not even be applicable after a point—in several types of action narrative, the discursive shift is a shift away from telling a story towards capturing an *experience*, in which individual events are increasingly stripped of context as the rules of the game threaten to change repeatedly. If this form of antinarrative is, as Steven Shaviro suggests, an attempt to describe a 21st-century affective experience either described by or perpetuated in film, with all of the ideological implications of adopting such a framework as ‘realistic,’ then it invites important questions. What’s the point of narrativizing lived experience when the terms of reality are constantly in flux, necessitating a constant revision of the story?

The question itself can be anxiety-inducing on the most personal level. If our context is constantly changing, the way we understand our relationship to that context has to change as well. *Prófugos* enters the same kind of twist-normalizing as *Iron Man* even as it attempts to identify the psychological impact of a fluctuating, unstable reality on its characters. Rewriting the story once in a while may not be anxiety-inducing, but *Prófugos* dials the need for revision to an inescapably constant extreme to suggest that in an unstable reality, the very construction of identity is at stake. Vicente Farragut, son of cartel leader Kika Farragut, is rapidly forced to abandon his own narrative—his dreams of becoming a veterinarian, avoiding the drug trade, and pursuing a romantic relationship with politician Emiliano Encina—as increasingly out-of-control circumstances back him into leadership roles and eventually force him into heirdom after the murder of his mother. Undercover cop Álvaro Parraguez faces a far more difficult predicament; initially a key component of the sting operation against the group of protagonists he’s successfully infiltrated, he runs afoul of a police corruption ring that would rather see him dead

in addition to the drug traffickers he's brought them, and is forced to go on the run with the same people he tried to put behind bars but now depends on to survive. By the fourth episode, he's a confused mess—as he washes up in front of the bathroom mirror of a Santiago hotel where the fugitives are hiding, a rare opportunity to reflect on the past few days, he looks in the mirror for a short period of time before splashing water on his face, which transitions into a series of self-punishing slaps³⁰ before he spits, twice, at his reflected image.³¹ The very act of looking at himself in the mirror comes wrapped in confusion and violence. Circumstances have stripped his identity of its context—the people he'd previously reported to now want him dead, and his fellow fugitives would kill him if they knew. In the wake of the port shootout in Valparaíso, Parraguez exists in a state of limbo where few-to-none of his previous reference points apply.

Benjamín Vicuña, the actor who portrays Parraguez in the series, sees an implicit connection between the policeman's fugitive status and the insecurity of identity that this constant state of change and flight creates. In an interview with Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, Vicuña describes his approach to the character: “lo único que él busca es recobrar la normalidad. Quiere abandonar este estado constante de escapar y de acción, para concentrarse en su vida, debido a que siente que perdió su identidad y ya no sabe quién es.”³² Vicuña situates the normal as the antithesis to the cycle of ‘action’ and ‘escape’ in which his character moves, or is moved. There is no normalidad on the run, as the normal is constantly being ruptured. The actor also links his character's constant state of flight to loss of identity—he can't recover it as long as he's

³⁰ “Episode 4,” *Prófugos*. HBO Chile. 2011. (10:00)

³¹ *ibid.* (11:18)

³² ‘The only thing he's looking for is to recover normalcy. He wants to abandon this constant state of escape and action, to concentrate on his life, as he feels he's lost his identity and doesn't know who he is.’ qtd. in Karen Cordovez, “Benjamín Vicuña adelanta detalles de la nueva temporada de “Prófugos”, que se estrena hoy,” *El Mercurio*, September 15, 2013, <http://www.emol.com/noticias/magazine/2013/09/13/619640/benjamin-vicuna.html>

on the run, as long as the normal faces perpetual intrusion by the vagaries of chance. For Vicuña, the individual identity of Parraguez is clearly at stake.

Why bring up *Prófugos* in a discussion of heroism and plot in *Iron Man*? One of the most compelling elements of *Prófugos* is that it engages in the same antinarrativistic twist-reliance as *Iron Man*, but its characters aren't heroes—they're humans. Nobody has the benefits of Tony Stark's suit; nobody can resolve a shootout with repulsor weapons and wrist-mounted rockets, nobody has access to a targeting program that conveniently separates friend from foe, and nobody can easily escape from the brutality of the gamespace. The series whirls its protagonists through challenge after challenge without any sense that their situation is in any way improving—the characters are locked into a psychologically-demanding game with no clear endpoint, stuck pushing buttons in a kind of frenetic, ultra-violent incarnation of Farmville. They're playing the game, but they're not winning. And it's killing them—literally. Multiple central characters are dead by the end of the first season. Others are left traumatized. Our tentative case-study, Álvaro Parraguez, is left with fewer allies than ever after being framed for the assassination of the Minister of the Interior. The four central characters that survived the harbor shootout have turned against each other, as have the Farraguts. Little to nothing in the series remotely resembles a victory, merely continued struggle and continued psychological turmoil.

In contrast to the human lab rats of *Prófugos*, Tony Stark takes every curve ball the plot throws in his direction and comes out victorious. When wearing the suit, he is the antithesis incarnate of the fugitives who must constantly adapt to the demands of an ever-shifting reality where decisions are made for them—scenes like his escape from the Ten Rings' stronghold in Afghanistan demonstrate that reality doesn't shift against him but *for him*. The rules of Tony's

world change to allow him to travel one step closer to victory, not force him a step away from it. This sort of narrative forgiveness means that the industrialist can accomplish what the fugitive drug traffickers can't—he takes on a rigged game and wins. Tony Stark is a human capable of actually *beating* Farmville, and it's exactly this victory which validates his claim to hero status.

In a way, the differences between *Prófugos* and *Iron Man* don't seem particularly sharp. Both series employ antinarrativistic techniques to construct their respective realities as gamespaces and inscribe the logic of the game as the norm. The difference between them is which players they choose to humanize and which moralities they inject into the game—*Prófugos* focuses on the physical and psychological struggles of the losers or otherwise beleaguered players, whereas *Iron Man* elevates the winners to hero status, demonizing the losers or rendering them invisible. In this way, *Prófugos* meets *Iron Man* on previously established grounds, entering into a dialogue with twist narrative and game logic that can be treated as critique or, more importantly, the same kind of entertainment that twist narrative aspires to in the first place. In this way it's at an inherent disadvantage as a mode of criticism, since its criticisms can be colonized and co-opted by a discourse which unquestioningly demands superhuman psychological strength of characters. As entertainment, *Prófugos* risks reinscribing the same narrative tropes it attempts to question.

The fact that *Iron Man* and *Prófugos* alike function as entertainment is critically important, for the sole reason that their entertainment-status shields them from this level of analysis. They're pleasurable, the logic goes, a temporary escape rather than an engagement with reality. But why do we derive pleasure from escaping our lived realities in this way, and escaping to the world of Tony Stark, no less, with its own particular set of rules and convenient mutabilities? Why is victory the single most important trait we expect from our heroes? Here is

where the superhero film, even *Prófugos*, approach the realm of propaganda—our ‘mindless entertainment’ might indeed be the vicarious triumph over an increasingly difficult set of challenges, a reality that feels out of our control but remains within the mastery of the hero or the strength of the protagonists. Iron Man wins the game so that, once we leave the theater, we won’t have to. His victories are our victories, and it’s pleasurable to share these triumphs. It almost doesn’t matter that when we leave the theater we don’t get to bring them with us.

...el mal no se combate con el mal, ni el fuego se combate con fuego. Nosotros creemos que frente a este flagelo que significa el mal y el fuego, debemos esgrimir el bien y el agua como los únicos elementos que nos permiten, en un plano de libertad, terminar efectivamente con este flagelo de terrorismo en el país.³³

[...evil cannot be fought with evil, just as fire cannot be fought with fire. We believe that facing this scourge which signifies evil and fire, we should wield water and the good as the only elements that permit us, in a position of liberty, to end the scourge of terrorism in this country]

-Ambrosio Rodríguez, Attorney General of Chile, in a statement for the Franja del Sí

America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace, a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman.³⁴

-President George W. Bush, 2004 State of the Union Address

The Fetal Octopus: Proto-Gamer Theory in the Sí Campaign

Why follow an analysis of *Iron Man* with a discussion of the Si campaign? Where are its heroes, and what is the relationship between these heroes and the surrounding world? And where are the mutabilities in the campaign's narrative of Chilean society and the role of the dictatorship in relationship to it? In this campaign, I argue, the advertisers characterize past and present Chilean socioeconomic conditions as a kind of proto-gamespace where economic victory is idealized and the dictatorship itself is already hailed as a hero. Essentially, the government in the campaign is an early Tony Stark, making the argument that it answered egregious economic strife and present insecurities alike with an appropriate, measured, and ultimately successful response. Just as Stark's suit exerts a singularity effect, bending the universe around him to

³³ "Franja del SI," YouTube video, 14:30, posted by "Magdalena Dominguez," May 26, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7HhdbW4gHo> (6:01)

³⁴ George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address" (speech, Washington, DC, January 20, 2004), Washington Post. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/transcripts/bushtext_012004.html

satisfy a narrative chain of repeated victories, the campaign allows the dictatorship to select information that satisfies a similar narrative of present and continuing victory. And within this structure, the campaign is able to apply this concept of victory-as-heroism as it outlines a government-approved sense of ‘model citizenship’ – the citizens of the *Si* world that the campaign elevates are winners themselves, with the implicit message that prospective voters can be winners as well if they vote to extend Pinochet’s rule. All of the propagandic elements of *Iron Man* are present, albeit in a different configuration. Though the *Si* campaign was a practical failure, this is not to say that the elements that comprised it were in themselves ineffective—reconfigured and injected into a new context that discourages scrutiny, such as a 21st-century superhero film, they’re incredibly effective. For this reason, we jump back in time to see the roots of global capitalist ideology taking form on the fly—here, it’s haphazard, heavy-handed, ultimately unsuccessful, and therefore vulnerable to attack.

In contrast to *Iron Man*’s characterization of Tony’s world as simultaneously racked by crisis and kept stable by the hero-winner’s boundless capacity for victory, the opening spot on the first day of the campaign functions as a before-after statement, laying out a clear mission statement for the problems the dictatorship claims to have responded to, and attempts to demonstrate the Pinochet government’s success in surmounting these challenges. The *franja* itself becomes an analogue to the *Iron Man* suit, an attempt to bend the nature of dictatorship-era reality to establish the victory of the hero: a globally-minded capitalist right including Pinochet and his supporters. Establishing heroism, as Tony Stark now accomplishes to the currency-backed accolades of viewers worldwide, requires both a crisis and the surmounting of that crisis, and the *Si* campaign is initially quite transparent in its efforts to construct both. In the first seconds of the campaign, the camera focuses on a 1973 newspaper headline in which now-

deposed socialist president Salvador Allende announces flour shortages and displays a series of bread lines. A somber announcer describes the images as a sign of Marxism's failure in Chile:

1973. Allende notificaba a Chile: 'Hay Harina Sólo Para Tres o Cuatro Días.' Era el reconocimiento oficial al fracaso. En tanto las calles miles de personas agotadas, hastiadas e indignadas, hacían largas y denigrantes colas. Toda la noche, y parte importante del día para conseguir un poco de pan. El marxismo en poco tiempo había conculcado hasta lo más fundamental derecho humano: el derecho al pan.³⁵

In this way, the Allende regime is characterized as a period of intolerable crisis. The citizenry faces economic uncertainty at the most basic level, an uncertainty blamed on the bureaucracy and policies of the socialist government. (Also note the way that the TV spot enters a discourse of human rights to make its point—more on that later.) Marxism is inseparable from the egregious insecurity that preceded the dictatorship, and thus forms the crisis that will prove the heroism of the new government.

The next segment of the opening spot depicts a group of women articulating various sins of the Allende era. As the camera flashes from face to face, each woman is supposed to give a small part of a longer monologue:³⁶ "Lo que pasó hace quince años no puede repetirse. Yo quiero que mi país nunca vuelva a ver violencia extremista, desabastecimiento, inflación, mortalidad infantil, analfabetismo, falta de viviendas, falta de esperanzas, de dignidad femenina, de paz, de futuro. Nunca más pobreza, desamparo, hambre, incertidumbre."³⁷ The sins of the past—and it is important to note that many of these alleged characteristics of the past have carried through fifteen years of dictatorship rule—attempt to further articulate the crisis for

³⁵ '1973. Allende notified Chile: [quoting the newspaper headline] 'There are Only Three or Four Days Left of Wheat.' It was the official acknowledgement of the disaster. And in the streets, thousands of exhausted, weary and indignant people formed long and degrading lines. All night, and an important part of the day to acquire just a small amount of bread. In a short period of time, Marxism had infringed upon the most fundamental human right: the right to bread.' "Franja del SI – COMPLETA," YouTube video, 15:24, posted by "noapinerac," March 24, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e42E5HH-10>

³⁶ hilariously enough, it's the same woman's voice that's dubbed over all these shots.

³⁷ 'What happened fifteen years ago cannot happen again. I hope my country never again witnesses extremist violence, scarcity, inflation, infant mortality, illiteracy, lack of housing, lack of hope, of female dignity, of peace, of a future. Never again poverty, helplessness, hunger, uncertainty.' "Franja del SI – COMPLETA" (0:55)

which the Pinochet government was and still is the solution. While the No campaign has no problems engaging with issues of poverty and wealth distribution, thus complicating the dictatorship's victory narrative, the Si campaign's references to the Allende period attempt to reframe present economic uncertainty as the fault of the Unidad Popular [Popular Unity] government and Allende's presidency. Poverty takes on a dual role as a crisis over which the dictatorship has triumphed by deposing the socialist president, and, implicitly, the Pinochet government is 'winning' against this poverty in the present. Another Allende is intolerable; the only solution to instability is Pinochet.

This before-after construction of Chilean society extends as the campaign continues. As part of its attempt to counter the unpredicted success of the 'No' campaign and portray the opposition as a fractured body, the advertisers designing the spots for the 'Sí' option brought spokespeople from various political parties to counter the arguments of politicians who had previously appeared on television encouraging a vote against an additional eight years of Pinochet rule. Some of the politicians who lent testimony to the Sí campaign were or had once been members of parties which were currently backing the No option; one of the most prominent politicians tapped by the No campaign was future President Patricio Aylwin of the Democracia Cristiana party (DC) [Christian Democracy], a centrist party which had initially supported the coup but had all but thrown its support behind the No option by the time of the plebiscite. In its programming for the September 30th franja, the Sí campaign included testimonies from several more conservative Christian Democrats (even those who never played significant roles within the party) explaining why they were voting in favor of Pinochet—ex-legislator Santiago Gajardo Peillard's response outlines a dichotomy between chaotic past and promising present: "Por el hecho de que nuestros Institutos Armados el 11 de Septiembre 1973 encontraron a nuestro país

destruido, y lo han llevado hoy día a una posición de un promisorio porvenir, por estas razones, yo voto que ‘Sí’.”³⁸ The characterization of 1973’s Chile as a ‘destroyed’ country marks a retroactive attempt to redefine the role of the Pinochet government in relation to state violence; the implication is that Allendist economic policies destroyed Chile and the dictatorship has revived it—and, importantly, given it a future distinct from the pre-Pinochet past. The military government is not violent, though the leftist government that preceded it certainly is. Through these creative dichotomies, the dictator is portrayed as having triumphed over violence.

In what ways does the Pinochet government see itself as triumphant over a period of violent upheaval? In the opening spot of the campaign, after the somber announcer and overdubbed chorus outline the sins of the pre-dictatorship era, the soundtrack changes to an energetic late-eighties jingle—perfect for selling Coca-Cola—as images of studying children, a child swinging, industrial agriculture, fishing boats at sea, and shots of a father and child walking on a beach flash in the background. A new, cheerful announcer argues that a Sí vote is the right choice “Porque nos hemos ganado la democracia; plena, estable, y con total participación. Porque merecemos la paz y la grandeza, marchemos todos juntos hacia un país ganador.”³⁹ This speech is full of the language of victory; the repeated use of the verb ‘ganar’—to win—is present throughout. ‘Nos hemos *ganado* la democracia.’ ‘Un país *ganador*.’ The buzzword ‘Un país ganador’ [‘A winning country’] continues to appear throughout the campaign, in between spots and in the lyrics of feel-good jingles. Chile is worth celebrating because it’s a winner. And by transition, the government is a winner for removing Allende and instituting the conditions under which the country can be celebrated as a winner. Though the image of past chaos and present

³⁸ ‘Because our Armed Forces on September 11, 1973 found our country destroyed, and they have brought it today to the position of a promising future, for those reasons I will vote ‘Yes’.’ “Franja del Sí 30.09.88,” YouTube video, 13:23, posted by “msag1311,” October 5, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4zOWfn7mUs> (3:23)

³⁹ ‘Because we have achieved democracy; pure, stable, and with total participation. Because we deserve peace and greatness, let’s march all together toward a winning country.’ “Franja del SI – COMPLETA” (1:47)

stability paints a facile picture that skims over a decade and a half of complex social and economic history as well as a complex present, this narrative technique, in which the act of victory itself (no matter how contrived or loosely-defined) is cast as inherently heroic. The seeds of Iron Man are being planted as the Pinochet government starts to set the terms of the game.

At the same time, though the *Sí* advertisers attempt to outline a clear separation between Allendist chaos and present victory, the fear of a return to state socialism on the model of Allende's Unidad Popular [Popular Unity] is a prominent fixture throughout the campaign. Maybe unintentionally, the campaign treats its initial crisis (the UP government of 1970-1973) and its solution during fifteen years of Pinochet's rule as simultaneous events in the current temporality of the campaign. Slogans such as 'Seguimos adelante o volvemos a la U.P.'⁴⁰ don't demonstrate a distinction between past and present. What they demonstrate is a characterization of the world that bears interesting parallels with *Iron Man*'s crisis-racked but consistently saved reality—by bringing the return of the UP government into the present as a possibility should the 'No' option win the plebiscite, the '*Sí*' campaign's discursive strategy takes the same past it claims to have defeated and counterproductively projects it into the future as a possible path. The present always comes with a state of crisis tied up in its own solution, though the stability of this construction is less finely tuned than the breakneck luster of Tony Stark's world, to the point where the future becomes worrisome under the weight of possibility, rather than a mere extension of a gamelike present and its logic. By making these rhetorical moves, the campaign risks undercutting its own claims to victory, even as it attempts to demonstrate the high stakes of the plebiscite.

How are these mixed messages operating in the campaign, and when are they operating as mixed messages? The '*Sí*' advertisers' responses to the 'No' campaign give the impression

⁴⁰ 'We continue forward or we return to the U.P.'

that the opposition's unexpected challenge has pushed the riskiest techniques of the pro-dictatorship forces to the point where cracks start showing. In another spot⁴¹ from the September 30th program, the Sí campaign challenges a 'No' spot's assertion that "El pasado no vuelve" ["The past is not returning"]. "FALSO," asserts an announcer, "El pasado ya volvió. Véalo..."⁴² The camera cuts to a Mexican interview with Sergio Buschmann, fugitive and member of the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez,⁴³ a communist-aligned militant organization which had previously attempted to assassinate Pinochet. We see various shots of Buschmann commenting on the state of the organization, and in the last clip, he claims with a smile and a laugh that "permanecen, en algunos lugares están combatiendo"⁴⁴ and the spot ends. Viewers are to understand that the terrorist threat posed by the FPMR is still very much present, based on the very words of one of its leaders-in-exile. Victory over leftist violence is no longer presupposed, and in this way the dictatorship undercuts the same legitimacy it attempts to establish in the rest of the campaign. 'El país ganador' is no longer 'ganando', but left frightened by the worst-case scenario that the same people it's actively fighting might take over if Chile's loss is formalized in the plebiscite.

As a simultaneous site of 'twist' and possible victory, the FPMR plays a prominent and therefore interesting role in the campaign. An early spot involves a lengthy description of the events of September 7th, 1986—an FPMR attempt to assassinate Augusto Pinochet in the Cajón de Maipo near Santiago (known as Operación Siglo XX⁴⁵), which resulted in five deaths and several injuries among Pinochet's escort, as well as four additional deaths that night in reprisals

⁴¹ "Franja del Sí 30.09.88" (1:30)

⁴² 'FALSE. The past has already returned. Observe...'

⁴³ 'Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front'—humorously rendered as 'Frente Manuel Rodríguez' in the campaign spot in question as well as in conservative media outlets. The implication that communist militants who have attempted to assassinate El Presidente could be in any way patriotic seems to make the 'Si' team and their supporters uncomfortable.

⁴⁴ 'In some places they're still fighting'

⁴⁵ 'Operation 20th Century'

by the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI), Chile's intelligence agency at the time.⁴⁶

Recreating the attack in such a prominent way most definitely destabilizes the dictatorship's before-after narrative, but the presentation of the attack presents tentative attempts at the same kind of smooth crisis-victory constructions that border on seamlessness in *Iron Man*. For the majority of the film, each successive mini-twist comes with an immediate and successful resolution—proportionality, as Steven Shaviro characterizes the trope when it appears in the context of action-adventure film. In the television spot recounting the FPMR's assassination attempt against Pinochet, we can see the campaign's unsuccessful attempts to code its 'victory' into the way it contextualizes the event. After an announcer recounts the damage done to the presidential car, the ad shows news footage of Pinochet in civilian clothes next to the bullet-riddled vehicle and walking a journalist through the attack, as the announcer recites comments he attributes to Pinochet:

“Yo iba con mi nieto menor, Rodrigo,” señaló el mandatario. “Mi primera reacción fue salir, pero me acordé de Rodrigo. Entonces, cubrí su cuerpo con el mío.” Agregó, “Esto prueba que el terrorismo es serio. Así que es bueno que ciertos políticos se den cuenta de que estamos en guerra. La alternativa es marxismo y caos, o democracia.”⁴⁷

Where is 'un país ganador' in this attack? There's no Tony Stark and certainly no Iron Man suit to repel the insidious forces of the 'Frente Manuel Rodríguez' with the right weapon at the right time—at other moments the campaign's framing of the facts to suit its victory narrative functions like the suit, facilitating a crisis-resolution relationship between Allende's failures and Pinochet's triumph over economic insecurity. In the recounting of the attack, this victory narrative is subtle and risks getting lost, but its disjointed elements are present nonetheless. Pinochet's return to the

⁴⁶ “Atentado a Pinochet: El día en que el FPMR perdió la ‘Guerra Popular’,” *La Nación*, September 7, 2013, <http://www.lanacion.cl/atentado-a-pinochet-el-dia-en-que-el-fpmr-perdio-la-guerra-popular/noticias/2013-09-05/200853.html>

⁴⁷ “I was traveling with my younger grandson, Rodrigo,” said the executive. “My first instinct was to leave, but I remembered Rodrigo. So I covered his body with my own.” He added, “This proves that terrorism is serious. So it's good that certain politicians understand that we're at war. The choice is Marxism and chaos, or democracy.” “Franja del SI” (4:15)

scene of the assassination attempt to describe the experience demonstrates a certain mastery of the event—the attack, clearly, has failed to accomplish its objective. Marxism is successfully cast as violent ideology and linked to the opposition. On the other hand—and thankfully these rhetorical moves remain half-tuned in this ad—the quote, delivered through an intermediary, implies that several aspects of the system are working to mitigate and triumph over attacks like this assassination attempt. In mentioning politicians, the statement appeals to the same democratic values the government claims to have instilled as part of its victory, and, moreover, it suggests that the ultimate power in dictatorship-era Chile lies with the legislature, not the military general occupying the president's chair. Their decisions, allegedly, bear strong implications for the actions that Pinochet himself takes. And in summing up the campaign as a choice between Marxist-influenced chaos and democracy safeguarded by dictatorship, the quote suggests that the best option has already won out.

Another less subtle victory that plays out in the campaign's recounting of events is the triumph of family values over violence and leftist ideology. The spot makes sure to mention that during the FPMR attack, the life of Pinochet's grandson, Rodrigo was placed in danger. Perhaps more importantly, Pinochet risked his own life to protect that of his grandson by using his own body to shield him against the bullets. It's an important humanizing moment; when faced with a threat to his life, the dictator's priority becomes to defend the life of a small child, a member of his family. Moreover, this aspect of the ad works to set up a clear moral dichotomy between the president and the militants that assault his convoy. Family is a discourse that separates the Sí campaign's 'us' from its 'them,' in which the victims of the attack are defined through their family connections, whereas their FPMR attackers are not.

The conclusion of the spot is the testimony of the widow of Cabo 2° Cardenio Hernández Cubillos⁴⁸, one of Pinochet's military escorts and a victim of the attack. In discussing the years since his death, she describes Cabo Hernández's legacy through the pain and pride of the family he left behind, as well as the ideals for which he sacrificed himself:

Hoy se cumplen dos años que el Cabo 2° Cardenio Hernández Cubillos, mi esposo, fuera asesinado brutalmente por los extremistas en el Cajón del Maipo, donde no saben qué dolor dejaron atrás. Sus hijas, sus padres, y en general toda su familia que lo desacuerda pero con orgullo, no porque haya muerto, sino porque dio su vida por este país, por la patria, y por su presidente que siempre fue su meta más importante.⁴⁹

After delivering this statement, the audio cuts out, and she breaks down in tears before the spot ends. It's a powerful moment, but not because it's an admission of defeat. The Cabo's widow emphasizes pride and patriotism⁵⁰ over mourning, thus dramatizing the triumph of these ideals under the military regime. In the context of the campaign, this scene serves a similar function to Pinochet's defense of his grandson. The inclusion of Hernández's widow, not identified by name in the spot, defines a victim of the attack by his family connections and thus humanizes the family networks that were assaulted rather than seeking common humanity in the disconnected, isolated militants of the FPMR who executed the operation. The assailants' connections are a bit less personal in nature; the announcer claims that the official investigation revealed the "participación de extremistas extranjeros, y el apoyo de la Unión Soviética para retomar el poder perdido en Chile y ampliar su influencia hacía el Pacífico."⁵¹ Whereas the victims of the attack are defined by their familial connections, the FPMR is defined by its connections to foreign

⁴⁸ The widow of Cabo 2° Hernández may refer to her husband by name, but the campaign spot does not, in turn, provide hers.

⁴⁹ 'Today it's been two years since Second Corporal Cardenio Hernández Cubillos, my husband, was brutally murdered by extremists in the Cajón del Maipo, where they didn't know the pain they left behind. His daughters, his parents, and in general all his family which is forgetting him but with pride, not because he's died, but because he gave his life for this country, for the fatherland, and for his president which was always his most important calling.' "Franja del SI" (4:50)

⁵⁰ A quality symbolically stripped from the 'Frente Manuel Rodríguez.'

⁵¹ 'participation of foreign extremists, and the support of the Soviet Union to retake its lost power in Chile and extend its influence across the Pacific' "Franja del SI" (4:03)

militants and to the Soviet Union. In staving off the attack, Pinochet's guards have won a victory for family values over political ideology, thus providing an example of the same kinds of ideals that the dictatorship has successfully defended and will continue to defend.

The triumph of family values over Marxist militancy bears out a central ideological pillar of the dictatorship's own sense of legitimacy. In Gwynn Thomas's monograph on the history of the concept of family in contemporary Chilean politics, she suggests that cultural ideas of the family are employed as a political common ground that a wide variety of factions contest in order to paint themselves as more legitimate rulers. In the case of the Pinochet regime, Thomas writes that "Pinochet and his supporters embraced the idea that familial welfare (defined most often as protection) was a fundamental responsibility of the Chilean state and one that justified the establishment of the authoritarian government."⁵² This concept perfectly echoes the logic borne out in the Sí campaign's commemoration of Operación Siglo XX. As the government of the state, the dictatorship maintains its dedication to family values as that which separates it from the opposition. A victory for the Chilean dictatorship is also a victory for the Chilean family. And, indeed, in the testimony of Cabo Hernández's widow, family and government begin to blend as concepts. In claiming that her family is proud of Hernández for his sacrifices to the '*patria*'—or 'fatherland'—the state and Pinochet himself take on fatherlike roles. Echoing the priorities of the widow in telling her story, the spot returns to the events of September 7th, 1986 not to lament the deaths of Chilean soldiers, but to demonstrate the victory of the ideology they defended.

Other pillars of the dictatorship's claims to legitimacy emerge victorious as well in the retelling of the assassination attempt, though to find these victories we need to look at the way

⁵² Gwynn Thomas. *Contesting Political Legitimacy in Chile: Familial Ideals, Citizenship, and Political Struggle, 1970-1990* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 15.

these events are contextualized in the rest of the Si programming for that day. In a subsequent segment titled ‘Usted pregunta. El gobierno responde,’⁵³ Chilean Attorney-General Ambrosio Rodríguez responds to a woman’s concerns over how the government would handle a possible leftist revolt in the wake of a Sí victory:

Señora usted, su pregunta va dirigida a los aspectos claves de los cuales actúa o se derrota el terrorismo. ¿Cuál es la desinformación? Vale decir el hecho de traspasar la responsabilidad por los actos terroristas que los sectores extremistas producen en contra del gobierno. Nosotros sabemos que el país ya no se deja sorprender por esta táctica. Porque se han sido suficientemente aclarados los hechos de mayor violencia que había corrido el país en donde siempre de forma invariable, han aparecido vinculados sectores que profesan una ideología marxista y que hoy día están formando parte de las organizaciones políticas que todos conocemos. De consiguiente, triunfante el Si, el gobierno mantendrá en forma integral la aplicación de la ley como única manera de reexpedir el terrorismo, porque esa es la forma civilizada en que se actúan los países democráticos. Porque el mal no se combate con el mal, ni el fuego se combate con fuego. Nosotros creemos que frente a este flagelo que significa el mal y el fuego, debemos esgrimir el bien y el agua como los únicos elementos que nos permiten, en un plano de libertad, terminar definitivamente con este flagelo de terrorismo en el país.⁵⁴

This speech entails both a creative reframing of the historical facts of government counterterrorist operations since 1973, as well as an expression of values that have ‘triumphed’ under the dictatorship. First, Rodríguez dismisses as ‘disinformation’ the argument that the military government is responsible for the violence against it. He progresses from here to stress the dictatorship’s commitment to the rule of law as a means of combating terrorist activity, describing Pinochet-era counterterrorism policy as ‘civilized’ and even ‘democratic.’ In this way, Rodríguez’s speech intersects thematically with the earlier comments attributed to Pinochet

⁵³ ‘You ask questions. The government answers.’

⁵⁴ ‘Madam, your question gets directly at the key aspects through which terrorism acts or defeats itself. What is the disinformation? It’s right to say the act of transferring the responsibility for terrorist acts which extremist groups produce in defiance of the government. We know already that the country remains unsurprised by this tactic. Because the facts—of increased violence traversing the country in which, invariably, many sectors that have arisen professing a Marxist ideology form part of the political organizations we’re all aware of—have been sufficiently clarified. Consequently, if the ‘Si’ triumphs, the government will maintain, in integral form, the application of the law as the only way to stave off terrorism, because this is the civilized manner in which democratic countries act. Because evil cannot be fought with evil, just as fire cannot be fought with fire. We believe that facing this scourge which signifies evil and fire, we should wield water and the good as the only elements that permit us, in a position of liberty, to end the scourge of terrorism in this country.’ “Franja del SI” (6:01)

in response to the assassination attempt, in which he expresses his gratitude that certain politicians understand the existence of a state of war between the government and militants.

Both Pinochet and Rodríguez appeal to democratic values, and express a sense of confidence that these democratic values—which, don't forget, *they are currently upholding*—are an appropriate, humane, and ultimately successful means of countering terrorism. In this way, the campaign's return to Operación Siglo XX can be interpreted as an attempt to demonstrate the victory of the current government's ideals over the FPMR guerrillas on multiple fronts: militarily, morally, and ideologically. Pinochet's guards stave off the attackers at great cost, the victims demonstrate on-screen a level of familial loyalty that we have no opportunity to observe in their attackers, and we're repeatedly told that the democratic systems instituted by the dictatorship are triumphing over the threat of terrorism. In this moment, the campaign's attempts to frame its legacy as a series of heroic victories may be less finely-tuned and immediate than the Iron Man suit's reality-bending and victory-guaranteeing abilities, but a premature form of the same kind of winner-idolatry found in *Iron Man* is conspicuously present.

In this context, what do we do with the slogan 'Un país ganador'? Though the campaign risks undermining its own sense of victory through fearmongering, that is not to discount the fact that it puts winners on a pedestal. Who, beyond representatives of the dictatorship itself, end up on this pedestal? Which elements of society are elevated as victors, and what does this victory entail? Who are the ganadores of el país ganador? Or, phrased in a different way that potentially accommodates the fearmongering in the campaign's predictions of chaos and Marxist terrorism, who stands to lose the most from a No victory?

With the slogan 'Un país ganador,' the entire country is portrayed as victorious—perhaps more importantly, *capable* of victory. In what ways, according to the campaign, has the country

won, or in what ways is it currently winning? The opening day of the *franja* is mostly dry in its presentation of nationwide victory on the economic front, focusing primarily on fruit exports and charts which demonstrate economic development. One spot shows the loading of bananas into trucks as an excited narrator provides statistics on the growth of fruit exports since 1970: “¿Sabía usted qué en 1970 Chile exportaba solo 13 millones de dolares en fruta? El año pasado, las frutas chilenas vendidas al mundo superaron a los 590 millones de dolares.”⁵⁵ A later spot from the same day maintains that “Chile, país ganador, ahora es el exportador más grande de fruta del hemisferio sur, superando a Brasil y Argentina.”⁵⁶ This early on, Chile’s victory is predicated on statistics that show it standing out from other countries which compete in the same industries. A rapid expansion in fruit exports and a measurable victory against competing countries in volume marks a cold triumph stripped of the human factor. Segments from later in the day’s programming involve interviews with workers at multiple levels of the fruit industry, but for the most part these serve as a means to convey various statistics or for employees to mention an increase in foreign buyers. In these spots, Chile gains the title of “Un país ganador” through its economic performance on the macro level.

How does the campaign attempt to connect viewers with Chile’s victories in the monolithic and impersonal realm of economic growth? To personalize their narrative of economic progress, the campaign relies increasingly on testimony from members of the Chilean elite and footage of citizens moving in upper-class spaces. Interviews with politicians remain a prominent technique—significant parts of the *franja* are given to individual parties which support the *Sí* option in the plebiscite. A spot on the first day of the campaign is given to *Renovación*

⁵⁵ ‘Did you know that in 1970 Chile only exported \$13 million in fruit? Last year, the worth of Chilean fruits sold worldwide totaled more than \$590 million.’ “*Franja del Sí – Plebiscito 1988 Chile*,” YouTube video, 12:56, posted by “Lucifer asa,” July 2, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcB6Xvc9Le0> (4:23)

⁵⁶ ‘Chile, winning country, is now the largest fruit exporter in the Southern Hemisphere, surpassing Brazil and Argentina.’ *ibid.* (5:49)

Nacional [National Renewal], which chooses to spend a significant amount of screen time on an interview in the home of Andrés Allamand. From a couch in his ornately-furnished living room he explains his future ‘Sí’ vote in the plebiscite:

Usted como yo, tenemos una familia de proteger. Y tenemos un futuro mejor para el que luchar. Y por lo mismo, no tenemos derecho equivocarnos en el próximo plebiscito. Si algo caracteriza el régimen militar que termina, es que están sentadas las bases para el crecimiento económico. Chile ha iniciado un gran cambio en este campo, y este cambio se puede resumir en una frase: no es el estado, ni mucho menos las burocracias gobernantes de turno las que crean el progreso. El desarrollo lo crea usted.⁵⁷

Allamand makes a set of interesting moves here. By ending with a slogan like ‘El desarrollo lo crea usted,’ he finds a way to personalize a concept as complex as economic development by tying the question of whether or not Chile develops to the agency of the viewer. The effects of this are twofold. First, Allamand engages in a narrative of personal responsibility—one assumes that if you’re not personally advancing economically, you’re holding back potential development. Second, if development is created by the individual, then the Chilean viewer shares in Chile’s macroeconomic victories and gains characteristics of a winner as well. The side effect of individualizing economic responsibility and economic victory in this way is the implication that the people who fared better during the dictatorship have a greater share of responsibility for the nation’s development, a message coded into Allamand’s upper-class surroundings. Why have members of the elite testify? Likely for the same reason that Tony Stark is a genius billionaire, and for the same reason that the Iron Man suit must bend the terms of reality to facilitate additional successes. From its opening day, the Sí campaign moves toward a characterization of Chilean society as a game space where victory is not only possible but

⁵⁷ ‘You, like me, have a family to protect. And we have a better future to fight for. And at the same time, we have to right to make a mistake on the next plebiscite. If anything characterizes the outgoing military regime, it’s that the bases for economic freedom have been established. Chile has begun a great change in this field, and this change can be summed up in one sentence: it’s not the state, much less the bureaucracies on-duty that create progress. *You* create progress.’ “Franja del Sí – Plebiscito 1988 Chile.” (10:22)

elevated to a social value, and those who testify in favor of Pinochet exemplify this value through their own economic victories. Those who fail to keep up don't seem worthy of mention.

These class-slanted representations of Chilean society in the Sí campaign and reluctance to portray anyone but 'winners' in a positive light are best highlighted through a central tactic of the opposition's campaign. The anti-Pinochet advertising team spends a significant amount of time filming and conducting interviews in non-upper-class spaces. One spot involves an interview with a woman from the city of Valparaíso who discusses the difficulties of feeding a family of eight to ten people on a salary of five-thousand pesos⁵⁸, and another features a set of interviews with Chileans who have found themselves working in 'oficios informales,' the informal economy, due to a lack of opportunity.⁵⁹ The campaign also conducts interviews in indigenous communities as well, demonstrating the ethnic as well as economic diversity of the nation.⁶⁰ Economic experts give statistics suggesting a climate of economic uncertainty and struggle—former Minister of Finance Andrés Zaldívar claims that “Hoy día, trabajadores tienen 15% menos poder adquisitivo que comparado con el año 1970.”⁶¹ While the Sí campaign's tactics choose to privilege those aspects of Chilean society that have won the game—its very own upper-class Iron Man figurines—the No campaign questions the fairness and social utility of a game which requires the elevation of victory as a virtue in its own right, as well as the invisibility of those who lose.

This significant discursive difference between the Sí and No campaign is, interestingly enough, summed up in McKenzie Wark's 2006 article, “Gamer Theory.” In presenting his ideas of global capitalist ideology as the penetration of gaming logic at multiple cultural levels, Wark

⁵⁸ “Campaña Franja del No – Plebiscito Año 1988,” YouTube video, posted by “gadjose,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJpzxDUwH74> (23:45)

⁵⁹ *ibid.* (25:54)

⁶⁰ *ibid.* (13:45)

⁶¹ “Today, workers have 15% less purchasing power than they had in 1970.” *ibid.* (1:11:39)

writes that “As for who owns the teams and who runs the league, best not to ask. As for who is excluded from the big leagues and high scores, best not to ask. As for who keeps the score and who makes the rules, best not to ask. As for what ruling body does the handicapping and on what basis, best not to ask. All is for the best in the best—and only—possible world.”⁶² The Sí campaign does not describe the economic climate created by the dictatorship in a way that addresses the behind-the-scenes mechanics of the game or the ways in which certain groups have benefited far less than others or seen their situations worsen. In contrast to the No, which spends a significant amount of screen time questioning the effectiveness of the government’s economic model, Pinochet’s advertisers simply present examples of the system working well—which requires the display and elevation of people who face the anxieties of the unpredictable market and, like Tony Stark, ultimately come out on top, apparently unscathed. But that’s not to say that the Sí campaign is unaware of the social instability that the opposition blames on economic uncertainty. In fact, the campaign simply presents different explanations—in the pro-government advertising spots, the responsibility for instability lies solely with the opposition, specifically Marxist guerrillas and violent protestors.

⁶² Wark, “Gamer Theory.” 216.

“Where is Aztecland? Where is Inca-Blinca? Where is Unsteadystan?”⁶³

- Ariel Dorfman, Chilean novelist, playwright, academic, activist; and

Armand Mattelart, French academic - *How to Read Donald Duck* (1971)

*

Constructing an Other: the Frightening, Inscrutable, Incompetent Enemy

(Or, How to Succeed at Counterterrorism without Really Trying)

After the sudden success of the ‘No’ campaign, the ‘Si’ campaign turned to a variety of tactics to counter both its tone of intense optimism and its critiques of economic insecurity stemming from the government’s economic system. One method of achieving this was to contrast the positivity of the ‘No’ message with images of social upheaval attributed to leftist ideology. Through this technique, the dictatorship sought to justify its existence as a last defense against the existential threat of ‘Marxism,’ not to mention portray its continued victory over the terrorist threat as a source of legitimacy in and of itself.

One spot that emphasizes this trend begins by recycling footage of one of the most memorable ‘No’ spots, which had presented an uplifting song encouraging an anti-dictatorship vote: “Chile, la alegría ya viene” [“Chile, happiness is coming”]. After a few seconds of the original spot, the frame freezes with a conspicuous sound, and a voice cuts in to ask, “¿Cómo cómo cómo? A ver...¿lo podemos ver de nuevo?”⁶⁴ Immediately, the frame cuts to shots of mass protests, people throwing Molotov cocktails, and chanting to the tune of the No campaign’s song—it’s unclear whether this chant was recorded at an anti-government protest or invented in the studio, but the lyrics of the song have been changed from “Chile, happiness is

⁶³ Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart. *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, trans. David Kunzle (New York: International General, 1975). 48.

⁶⁴ ‘Wait, wait, wait, wait. Let’s see...could we see that again?’

coming” to “Chile, the Marxists are coming.”⁶⁵ In this spot, the use of the term ‘Marxist’ is used as a catch-all for the opposition; to vote against Pinochet is to vote for a Marxist takeover. In the previous section, Marxism in the Sí campaign was discussed primarily in relation to guerrilla warfare—referred to as terrorist activity by pro-dictatorship elements. Here, the opposition itself is portrayed as inextricable from the same violence demonstrated by groups like the FPMR. Though my previous discussion of Sí campaign coverage of FPMR violence suggested that it ran the risk of jeopardizing its victory narrative, spots like this one which directly satirize the opposition’s advertisements may represent a more finely-tuned and more controlled use of Marxism as Other. More than a simple face for the chaos that could ensue in the event of a No victory, Marxism provides an opportunity to raise the stakes of the Sí campaign’s victory narratives—a violent Other allows victories to *mean* something instead of letting them dissipate in the dry charts and statistics from the first day of the franja.

One premise from the campaign’s first day that *does* contextualize the contributions of Marxism to the Chilean gamespace and Pinochetista victory narratives is the idea that capitalism is already triumphing as an ideology. Journalist, lawyer and economist Hermogenes Pérez de Arce gives a statement suggesting that capitalism has already triumphed over communism, simply based on patterns of migration between certain systems and others:

Un periodista chileno ha dicho que para saber cualquier sistema social económico es mejor, es cuestión de ver para qué lado del mundo arranquen la gente. Sería muy raro encontrar un alemán occidental que atraviesa el muro de Berlín para irse a vivir en la Alemania socialista. O un cubano que encuentra refugio en Miami tratando de volver al régimen opresivo de Castro. O un nicaragüense que se ha refugiado en Costa Rica volviendo a la Nicaragua socialista. Sería muy raro que los chilenos después de haber conseguido su libertades e incentivas votaran no, volviendo al socialismo. En el mundo

⁶⁵ “CAMPAÑA DEL TERROR. LA FRANJA DEL SÍ,” YouTube video, 3:09, posted by “almada2000,” October 6, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxuRWmEg8oE> (0:21)

de hoy la corriente del futuro pertenece a las libertades e incentivos al respeto de propiedad, del derecho a propiedad, la centralización, al estado pequeño.⁶⁶

All threat of violence surrounding Marxism is diluted through the context of a broader historical process in which migration patterns show a global, democratic election of capitalism over communism. Apparently, the philosophy of the dictatorship both assumes that this trend will continue and that their policies are the best expression of this trend. From the beginning, Marxist ideas are framed as a failed experiment whose global sway is on the wane. Thus, the violent revolutionary or protestor in the campaign is painted as dangerous, but a villain that is already defeated and nigh-quarantined in a distant past.

Later in the Si campaign, this concept of inevitable Marxist decline bears out through more creative means, especially through satire of individual ‘No’ spots. One ad in particular begins on the set of one of the opposition’s advertisements, showing a group of dancers shooting choreography to a rendition of the ubiquitous “Chile, la alegría ya viene.” Backstage, three masked men show up carrying Molotov cocktails—a director berates them for showing up late, and one explains that “Es que teníamos que hacer otra cosa antes, po”⁶⁷ before the group changes clothes and makes a show out of placing their improvised weapons on the table. They rush out onstage to join the dance number, but one of them has forgotten to remove his mask, revealing him publicly as a violent protestor. The image freezes and the camera zooms in on his covered face before an announcer claims, “Aunque el marxista se viste de seda, marxista

⁶⁶ ‘A Chilean journalist has said that to know which socioeconomic system is superior, it is a question of observing which part of the world people flee. It would be very strange to see a West German that crosses the Berlin Wall to live in socialist Germany. Or a Cuban that has found refuge in Miami trying to return to the oppressive regime of Castro. Or a Nicaraguan who has taken refuge in Costa Rica returning to socialist Nicaragua. It would be very strange if the Chileans, having achieved liberties and incentives, voted ‘No,’ returning to socialism. In today’s world, the current of the future is of liberties and incentives with respect to property, to property rights, centralization and a small state.’ “Franja del Sí – Plebiscito 1988 Chile.” (4:48)

⁶⁷ ‘But we had to do something else first.’

queda.”⁶⁸ In this way, the Sí campaign extends its attempt to discredit the opposition—the No campaign is reduced to a coalition of Marxists dressed in silk who are far too tolerant of social upheaval. The protestors in the spot are violent, no doubt, but in this advertisement they’re rendered comically impotent.

The Sí campaign’s version of the No spot conveys this impotence through an entertaining comedy of errors. The male dancers arrive late, still dressed for violent protest, we get to watch a director-figure berate them for being late, we see the group change clothes frantically to rush onstage, and then the camera freezes and focuses on the one dancer who forgot to remove his mask, giving a deer-in-the-headlights effect.⁶⁹ Though the intrusion of the Marxist protestors in a No campaign spot could also be said to capitalize on fears of social chaos should the anti-dictatorship campaign win the plebiscite, the chance to see the Sí campaign’s violent protestor rendered disorganized and ridiculous—and ultimately frozen in front of the camera—creates a sense of empowerment for the Sí supporter. The same No supporters who could incite chaos and throw Molotov cocktails are also too scatterbrained to remember to take off their masks before filming a television ad. This flash of condescending humor in the image of the opposition and the chance to freeze the image of a ‘Marxist’ in this ridiculous moment is an implicit opportunity for Chilean dictatorship to demonstrate its mastery of the existential threat that already features so prominently in its campaign ads. It is as if the editors of the franja mean to say that “These Marxists will drive this country to an apocalypse if you let them, but here, we have them under control—for your viewing pleasure.” Though the violent Other of the Sí campaign raises the stakes of the plebiscite, humor in the campaign demonstrates a sense of superiority. Essentially,

⁶⁸ “Though the Marxist may dress in silk, the Marxist remains.” “CAMPAÑA DEL TERROR” (1:06)

⁶⁹ “CAMPAÑA DEL TERROR.” (1:32)

the viewer is expected to take the threat of Marxist chaos seriously at the same time they're supposed to laugh it off.

The nuances of the Sí campaign's characterization of social instability as the work of dangerous but impotent Marxists could be said to prefigure the specific quirks of *Iron Man*'s treatment of its global context. More specifically, the Chilean government treats Marxist protest and terrorism in the same way that the narrative of *Iron Man* treats the War on Terror—in both works a struggle against terrorism is transferred to the background, primarily present to raise the stakes of the decontextualized victories from which heroism is derived. For this reason, the narrative must retain tight control over its terrorists to ensure that their contributions to the victory of the hero are rendered as 'safely' as possible.

Iron Man, as a product of an era where the most prominent Other of the United States is a diverse group of global terror networks such as al-Qaeda, includes as its chief Other a multinational militant group known as the Ten Rings. The film opens on a US military convoy traveling through rural Afghanistan, accompanied by Tony Stark who is there to demonstrate the latest Stark Industries weapon—similar to the dominant western historiography of a 'post-911' decade, the film begins with a terrorist attack. The convoy is assaulted by offscreen militants, and Stark is captured in the surrounding chaos.⁷⁰ The rest of the film, however, exercises a growing sense of mastery over the threat these terrorists pose through Tony Stark's previously-established ability to bend the terms of reality in his favor and outsmart or, more likely, overpower the Ten Rings at every turn. *Iron Man*'s closest analogue to the depiction of the Other's ultimate impotence is its most important plot twist, which forces the broader conflict between the United States and global terrorism to the background after the Ten Rings are revealed to be pawns of the corrupt Stark Industries board member Obadiah Staine. Obadiah and

⁷⁰ *Iron Man* (0:45)

Ten Rings leader Raza are seen meeting to discuss pieces of Stark's prototype suit used in his initial escape and found by the Ten Rings in the desert—at this moment, deciding that the group has outlived its usefulness, Staine uses a newly-developed Stark Industries weapon to temporarily paralyze Raza, has his security team murder the rest of the camp, and drives away, shifting the rest of the conflict to a personal war between American weapons-industry executives.⁷¹ Even in one of the Hollywood superhero industry's most direct nods to the conflict between the United States and Islamic terrorism since 9/11, the film backtracks at the last second to nullify the agency of the organization in the narrative. Its members are slaughtered by Staine's private security team and its leader is left paralyzed, a moment of weakness which presents eerie parallels with the freeze-framed 'silk Marxist' of the Si campaign. In gradually stripping the Other of agency, the film echoes the hero's victory over terrorism on a narrative level, as well as demonstrating American mastery over its foes. Even America at its most corrupt—personified by Staine—is capable of nullifying Raza and the Ten Rings as a threat.

In *Capitalist Superheroes*, Dan Hassler-Forest explores the condescending implications of the villain's symbolic nullification. Discussing the frequent use of plot twists in films such as *Iron Man* that reveal an ally of the main character as the central villain rather than figures designed to echo Western fears—which Hassler-Forest condemns as “Orientalist stereotypes”—the theorist sees these twists as a problematic extension of racist discourse:

...not only do these post-911 films put the patronizing stereotypes to unquestioning use in order to establish the antagonist's otherness, but the Orientalist villain's unmasking as a red herring also robs the character of agency in the narrative. This effectively removes the stereotype's narrative power, without dissolving the negative connotations that continue to define it, thereby adding insult to injury.⁷²

⁷¹ *Iron Man*. (1:25:42)

⁷² Hassler-Forest, *Capitalist Superheroes*, p95

The use of an ‘Oriental’ or terrorist Other in these films and the subsequent neutering of this Other by the film narrative is an interesting quirk to focus on. *Iron Man*’s central plot twist shifts the identity of the central villain from the Central/South Asian Raza to the North American Obadiah Staine, and it’s a transition secured by force—both through a literal show of force by Staine, and the forceful negation of the Ten Rings on the narrative level. The film, through capitalizing on fears of global Islamic terrorism as the United States’ inscrutable Other, can get away with loosely-accurate allusions to global terrorism merely to dump them late in the action for dramatic effect. The audience still gets to see the enemy defeated, but in an unexpected way—a way that ultimately reinforces existing hegemonies in a global politics of representation.

The reduction of the terrorist to a plot twist allows the screenwriters to piggyback off cultural understandings of terrorist-as-villain while escaping the need to address the motivations of these characters in detail—or, indeed, with any degree of verisimilitude. As the on-screen leader of the Ten Rings in *Iron Man*, Raza doesn’t seem to mention anything remotely resembling Islamism or anti-Western ideology at all. In his final meeting with Obadiah Staine, as they look over plans for Tony Stark’s weaponized suit, he remarks, awestruck, that “A man with a dozen of these could rule all of Asia.”⁷³ As a stand-in for al-Qaeda, an organization whose ideological components make it all the more difficult an enemy to engage with traditional American conflict-resolution strategies, the Ten Rings seem rather inadequate. And that, on some level, might be the point. The inclusion of terrorist figures in *Iron Man* represents a simultaneous acknowledgement and distancing from the War on Terror—the film captures audience insecurity about global terrorism while deliberately avoiding entering into dialogue with radical Islamist or anti-imperialist ideologies central to organizations like al-Qaeda. Instead, terrorists are only allowed into the Marvel universe if they agree to play by the rules: the

⁷³ *Iron Man* (1:27:00)

terrorist exists to be called a terrorist, until such a time as their cut-and-paste ideologies can be rendered irrelevant with a plot twist that reinscribes the superiority of the United States as a global power. The symbolic defeat of these characters is wired into the narrative framework of the film, specifically its willingness to sacrifice verisimilitude in order to deliver a victory.

This process, by which the Other is spliced into the narrative in a way that best facilitates its own defeat, recalls the ways that the Sí campaign imposes false binaries on violent actors other than the dictatorship's own soldiers and police. Looking back to the dictatorship's creative framing of the 1986 FPMR assassination attempt against Pinochet, we see a victory for family values where the dictator and his family are defined by their family connections and the leftist militants are not. In a classic case of self-other representational sleight-of-hand—perhaps better described as a rigged game—the Other is presented wholly incompatible with the society at which these images are targeted. Not only is the threat of leftist violence diminished to the point where protestors and militant groups are stripped of agency on the narrative level, but in moments like this the campaign strips any common ground for understanding from its depiction of the FPMR.

Protestors receive the exact same treatment—in an early ad, starting with the devious disclaimer “Esto no es real. Pero podría serlo,”⁷⁴ we're placed behind the camera as we run out into an apocalyptic urban space to get behind the wheel of a car, after which we see fires burning all around and masked figures advancing towards the camera with sticks and bats. “En el país del ‘No,’” an announcer warns, “el miedo anda por la calle.”⁷⁵ As the camera grows increasingly frantic and the crowd of masked figures bearing red flags converges on the car and starts beating against the windows, we get a brief flash of a child in the passenger seat, and finally the

⁷⁴ “This is not real. But it could be.” “Franja del SI” (1:04)

⁷⁵ ‘In the country of ‘No,’ fear walks the streets.’

announcer prophecies that if Pinochet is removed from office, “la primera víctima inocente puede ser alguien de *su familia*,”⁷⁶ before a protestor with a sledgehammer takes a swing at the window and the spot ends with a crash. As viewers, we don’t understand why these people are destroying the city, the car or the people inside it. The woman who carries the child to the car gains a special place of prominence in the editing room as the camera zooms in on her face for a moment—the Other is not given this luxury. Here, too, the same false dichotomies of the family discourse in the campaign’s coverage of Operación Siglo XX are at work, where the viewers and victims in the ad are defined by their family connections (“the first victim could be someone in *your family*”) but the protestors are barely defined as human. There are no grounds for understanding here; all we understand is that we can’t understand them beyond the recognition basic recognition that they’re faceless, violent Marxists that threaten the fabric of society and the family. Their violence is stripped of its rationality and heightened to an extreme of inscrutability.

This inability to understand the constructed Other, discursively elevated to dramatic heights in the Sí campaign, displays a similar politics of representation to the kind that the team of Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart reads in Disney comics during the early 1970s.⁷⁷ The delightfully-named *How to Read Donald Duck*, an attempt to push back against capitalist-imperialist ideology in Chilean mass media during the Allende period, makes the case that throughout the Donald Duck comics a variety of social issues are described in pathological terms:

⁷⁶ ‘The next victim could be someone in *your family*.’

⁷⁷ Disney is incredibly relevant to this discussion, particularly our discussion of *Iron Man*—not solely for its role in producing seemingly-innocuous entertainment, but for the fact that in 2009 Disney acquired Marvel Studios, producers of the Iron Man films as well as other highly-successful superhero blockbusters.

...when Scrooge is confronted by the possibility that Donald has taken to thieving (F 178), he says “My nephew, a robber? Before my own eyes? I must call the police and the lunatic asylum. He must have gone mad.” This statement reflects the reduction of criminal activity into a psychopathic disease, rather than the result of social conditioning. The bourgeoisie convert the defects of the working class which are the outcome of their exploitation, into moral blemishes, and objects of derision and censure, so as to weaken them and to conceal that exploitation. The bourgeoisie even impose their own values upon the ambitions of the enemy...⁷⁸

Dorfman and Mattelart’s suggestion that depictions of working-class theft as pathological simply obscure more complex patterns of exploitation at work—and, moreover, provide an opportunity for aspects of the Other to be silenced or judged based on the moral lenses of those with narrative power—helps us to bring this discussion of inscrutability and negation of agency back to the place it started. Why do these forms of media, which restrain Marxists and global Islamic terrorist groups alike as unwilling participants in rigged narrative games, enter into such discourses of simultaneous fear and negation? Of powerful yet impotent enemies designed to give heroes a meaningful victory? The prominence of such easily dismissible Others in the campaign and in the film might be because of their potential to distract from the blind spots in the ideological frameworks they construct.

What do I mean by ‘blind spots’? Elements of the narratives of the Sí campaign and *Iron Man* that complicate the discourses of victory at work. In the Sí campaign, this is especially conspicuous due to the tension between the government’s professed ideals of peace and democracy—implied to be ‘victorious’—and the role of detention, torture and disappearance of political dissidents as a means of social control since the 1973 coup. This reluctance to acknowledge these undemocratic aspects of the regime came to a head when a day of No programming focusing on torture was flat-out prevented from airing.⁷⁹ Likewise, *Iron Man*

⁷⁸ Dorfman, Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck*. 67.

⁷⁹ Shirley Christian, “Chilean TV Bars Opposition Tape,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1988, LexisNexis, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/?verb=sr&csi=6742&sr=BYLINE%28Shirley%29%2Bw%2F3%2>

presents a narrative of the War on Terror which, ironically enough, demonstrates reluctance to acknowledge the ideological complexities of the conflict or the role of the US military in combating terrorism. After the opening scene, never again do we see American troops in combat with the Ten Rings—the War on Terror is reduced to a proxy war in which Tony Stark and Obadiah Staine function as intermediaries between the Ten Rings and the US military, ultimately invisibilizing each larger group of combatants. The two Americans end up fighting each other, the terrorists disappear, America wins, Tony wins, and the audience goes home happy. Nowhere do we see examples of tactical extremism from the American forces; in *Iron Man* there is no Abu Ghiraib, no domestic surveillance state, no bombing of Fallujah, no Guantánamo, no waterboarding and certainly no collateral damage. All that remains is a series of victories with the War on Terror acting as a frame.

Astute viewers of *Iron Man* would be right to question whether the film truly leaves America blameless. The betrayal of Obadiah Staine, encapsulated in his under-the-table arms sales to the Ten Rings, could be seen as an indictment of the military-industrial complex and war profiteering seen during the so-named ‘post-9/11’ era. But it’s a less serious indictment than it appears. To revisit Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart’s critique of Donald Duck for a moment, the writers enter into an analysis of the unsubtle extravagance of Donald’s millionaire uncle Scrooge McDuck:

His outward role is that of the easy target, the tempting bait to divert the reader from all the issues we raise in this study. He is set up so as to leave intact the true mechanisms of domination. Attacking Scrooge is like knocking down the gatekeeper, a manifest but secondary symptom, so as to avoid confronting the remaining denizens of Disney’s castle. Could this garishly dramatized Mammon figure be designed to distract the reader’s attention, so that they will distrust Scrooge and no one else?⁸⁰

What does setting up the corrupt industrialist Staine as the central villain of *Iron Man* distract us from? In many respects Staine could be read as a sacrificial lamb killed to preserve the same ideological tolerance of war profiteering that his betrayal questions. After Staine's death, who's left at the helm of Stark Industries? Tony Stark. And after the smoke clears, Tony goes back to refining the ultimate weapon, the Iron Man suit. The fundamental difference between Staine and Stark is that the former provides weapons to *both* sides of the conflict and profits from the extension of the war, whereas Tony's weapon is intended to be used only in service of the 'good guys.' As long as the goal of weapons moguls is to *end* the war rather than prolong it, then there doesn't appear to be a problem. And any other American excesses don't even receive a mention.

These ideas of discursive silence designed to rig matches between self and other, of Obadiah Staine as a sacrificial lamb, can most definitely trace their roots back to the Sí campaign's silence surrounding the dictatorship's own violent legacy. This is most evident when the campaign appropriates a discourse of human rights to make its points. The opening spot of the *franja*, which depicts bread lines and food shortages during the Allende period, ends with the assertion that "El marxismo en poco tiempo había conculcado hasta lo más fundamental derecho humano: *el derecho al pan*."⁸¹ The implicit message is disturbing in its confidence; the mission of the dictatorship is to ensure that the Chilean people can eat, not protect the population from torture. They have their priorities straight, and the implication is that human rights groups do not. Never mind that a murdered detainee unceremoniously dropped out of a helicopter to a watery grave in the Pacific hasn't eaten for some time and never will again, never mind that many Chileans still live in poverty in the country of Sí, never mind the military government's

⁸¹ 'In a short period of time, Marxism had infringed upon the most fundamental human right: *the right to bread*.' (Emphasis mine) "Fanja del SI – COMPLETA." (0:32)

embrace of democratic institutions like torture and martial law—Pinochet is a *true* advocate for human rights.

Such ideological ‘re-tunings’ could be said to fill in the gaps in a narrative that attempts to derive legitimacy from victory itself. The seemingly paradoxical construction of the terrorist as inscrutable, dangerous, and ultimately irrelevant serves as the perfect lightning rod for audience insecurity. Taken collectively, the Marxists of the Sí campaign and the villains of *Iron Man* are simultaneously a subtle nod to an imperfect world and a straw-filled dummy for the hero of the day—whether it be the American industrialist or the Pinochet government—to beat up for the cameras. The ultimate service they provide to the so-called heroes they battle is to provide the opportunity for the victories which will inscribe and reinscribe the legitimacy of the hero.

Conclusion: Building a Better Mousetrap

How could the military government of Chile have made a better Sí campaign? It's an interesting question to ask. All the seeds of effective propaganda are there: an expression of hope for the future, an attempt to define the accomplishments of the dictatorship, a convenient enemy to take responsibility for any blind spots left by those accomplishments, an attempt to build a cult of personality around the dictator himself, even a discursive style that reframes lived experience in terms that reflect the dictatorship's core ideals. So why didn't it work? I'm going to avoid rereading tired discourses that imply the Chilean people voted for democracy because they saw the inherent superiority of the democratic system after fifteen years of military dictatorship and took the first way out to present itself through official channels. The Sí and No campaigns—with all their jingles, messages of hope, common usage of terms like 'democracy' and 'human rights', not to mention the aesthetic convergence of two contrasting political narratives relying on the same language of advertising—were far less distinguishable than liberal democracy's own victory narratives might give them credit for. The plebiscite of 1988 itself may have been an undeniable victory for the No campaign, but this does not change the fact that only 54.7% of tallied votes were in favor of the 'No,' while the remaining 43.01% still went to Augusto Pinochet.⁸² This means that, when all was said and done, the path advocated by the Sí narrative was the least objectionable option for millions of people. So the Sí campaign's loss doesn't necessarily imply the failure of its ideals, but its defeat at hands of superior advertising talent. The question, then, becomes how the campaign could have closed a 12 percentage point gap and squeaked out one last victory to complete its narrative of triumph.

As established earlier, the Sí campaign's most vulnerable moments are those in which its attempts to raise the stakes through referencing true events—like the FPMR's 1986 effort to

⁸² "Plebiscito 1988" *La Tercera*. <<http://especiales.latercera.cl/especiales/2008/plebiscitoSI-NO/>>

assassinate Pinochet in the Cajón del Maipo—actually call into question the legacy of victory the campaign attempts to construct. When the campaign dips into fearmongering tactics, it invites questions of whether or not Chile under Pinochet is truly ‘Un país ganador,’ and opens the door for the opposition to question other aspects of the dictatorship’s victory narrative. Former Minister of Finance Andrés Zaldívar can go on television and claim that he doesn’t believe that Chile is a ‘país ganador,’ citing economic statistics that prove that in many respects a staggering number of individuals are losing. The Sí campaign’s greatest flaw is that it makes its victory narrative vulnerable even through its attempts to enhance it.

How, then, could a particularly cynical advertising team—or, alternatively, a coalition of true believers—have better guarded from criticism the most vulnerable aspects of the Sí narrative? The feel-good jingles are fine. A representational bias in favor of upper class spaces is fine. Marxist protesters and leftist terrorists do just fine in their role as villains. An economic statistic here and there could be nice as well, but the first things to go need to be the historical referents used to contextualize the struggle against Marxism. This new, improved Sí campaign should avoid immediately identifiable reconstructions of Operación Siglo XX, and most definitely needs to avoid footage of violence at actual ‘No’ protests. Staged enactments of violent protestors or anti-government militant operations are still fine, but these should occur near the start of the campaign, where they can be contextualized with feel-good jingles and eventually buried in a narrative of victory after victory. Staged advertisements which seek to demonstrate the impotence of protestors or leftist terrorists should take on increased prominence as the campaign progresses. This ensures that the agency of anti-government forces within the campaign is strictly controlled—the opposition should not be able to exert their influence in the

space of the Sí franja beyond what the campaign deems necessary to establish its victory narrative.

In addition, the concept of Chile as a gamespace should be more fully developed. Make a subtle revision to a key slogan—transform Chile from a “país ganador” to a “país de ganadores.” Who cares if some people didn’t make it? An undeniable few are well off under the dictatorship. Devote the majority of screen time (any screen time not taken up by jingles and victories over those dastardly Marxists) to the stories of individuals who *have* been successful under Pinochet’s economic system. Go to their homes, listen to their stories, see them with their families, get to know them as human beings. Andrés Zaldivar can no longer question whether Chile is truly a ‘país ganador,’ as it no longer claims to be. Nobody can deny that certain people living in Pinochet’s Chile are wealthy, and the debate shifts to whether or not the government has an obligation to help those individuals that didn’t win its game.

The new campaign could take this new focus on individual winners one step further and give the responsibility for achieving staged victory after staged victory to a particularly exceptional individual. Maybe a member of the military or the police—or, preferably, a pro-government private citizen with access to enough resources to take on the Marxist threat on his own. The character should be constructed to appeal to as many sectors of Chilean society as possible, even at the cost of internal consistency. Have him foil fictional plot after fictional plot, give him the tools to let him nullify every curve ball the terrorists may throw his way, but keep him in a constant state of surprise to keep it interesting. And, in the spirit of keeping it interesting, nullify the agency of the terrorists completely in a final plot twist where a fellow member of the Chilean elite is revealed to have made millions lending economic support to leftist guerrillas as well as the military actors fighting them. Of course, our hero defeats him too,

and then all is well. If all this is just too over-the-top for a political campaign, the hero of the victory narrative can get his own feature film, packaged as lowbrow entertainment where the ideological structures at work can go more easily unquestioned. This sort of crossover between ideology and entertainment provides interesting opportunities for propaganda in a less overt setting. If the film's protagonist moves through a world that's constantly shifting and presents constant twists and excitement and this style of storytelling is repeatedly inscribed and coded as the norm, then other forms of media which attempt to engage with the implicit ideologies of this kind of narrative run the risk of affirming the very discourses they intend to question. The role of this feature film can complement the narratives of personal victory presented in the actual campaign, to the point where the ideology of dictatorship supporters and entertainment are nearly inextricable. Don't try to debate facts or even worldviews with the opposition, even though a bit of satire here or there is fine—create a world where your ideals are working perfectly, thus questioning the validity of the opposition's ideological frameworks, framed of course, as 'ideology' rather than 'reality.' Don't try to give voters an in-depth characterization of the problems the country faces in all their staggering complexity—if the problems you present can't be solved immediately after they arise, on screen, with a proportionate and well-timed victory, then they won't earn the 12 percentage points you need to win the plebiscite.

Instead, give the people what they want. Give them *Iron Man*.

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