



Postscript: Civilization or Barbarity

Carlos Motta

How do you teach democracy, through the barrel of a gun?

-- Father Roy Bourgeois' sign during a protest against *The School of The Americas* in Fort Benning, GA

In 1968 Argentinean filmmaker Fernando "Pino" Solanas made *La Hora de Los Hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces), a radical political documentary and manifesto that unapologetically advocated the construction of a just society, free from the forces of bourgeois neo-colonialism and U.S. and European imperialism. This major work, emblematic of the 1960s revolutionary filmmaking, is a heartfelt outcry for independence. Solanas and his co-screenwriter Octavio Getino formed the *Grupo Cine Liberación* (Liberation Cinema Group) and went on to formulate what they called *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema), a film practice that articulated the social, political and economic illnesses of the time from the perspective of "the people". Third Cinema distanced itself from the commercial pressure of Hollywood and the seemingly uncompromised attitude of European films *d'auteur*. Film for the Third Cinema was an aesthetic instrument to politicize, liberate and to create an awakening of critical consciousness.

Similarly, the work of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire was motivated by the rejection of the inequalities of the established social order, which enforced an elitist "banking model" of education in which information is "deposited" into students who are expected to digest it without asking any questions. Freire, alternatively, emphasized dialogue and praxis as means of developing consciousness; a consciousness understood to have the power to transform reality. Freire, like Solanas and Getino, was interested in developing critical tools for people to use as means to liberate themselves from oppression.

The decades that followed the release of *La Hora de Los Hornos* shattered Solanas's as well as Freire's social and political dreams. Since the 1970s, the U.S. has backed several military coups and dictatorships, civil wars, counter-revolutions, and countless other forms of intervention throughout the continent to systematically eradicate any



(socialist) project that may have challenged its economic power. Today, 40 years later, Latin America is still bleeding, dependent, ignorant, violent, poor, and oppressed.

These works — their political and historical contexts — have been important conceptual and methodological references for the making of *The Good Life*, a multi-part video project composed of over 360 video interviews with pedestrians on the streets of twelve cities in Latin America. The work examines processes of democratization as they relate to U.S. interventionist policies in the region. The conversations and dialogues — recorded in Bogotá, Colombia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Caracas, Venezuela; Guatemala City, Guatemala; La Paz, Bolivia; Managua, Nicaragua; Mexico City, Mexico; Panamá City, Panamá; Santiago, Chile; San Salvador, El Salvador; São Paulo, Brazil; and Tegucigalpa, Honduras — cover topics such as individuals' perceptions of U.S. foreign policy, democracy, leadership, and governance. The result is a wide spectrum of responses and opinions, which vary according to local situations and specific forms of government in each country.

The work is structured in the form of an Internet archive, which provides several ways to search through and access the material. It holds all the unedited video interviews, in an attempt to make the process of the work's making *transparent*, to allow the viewers to reflect on the inherent problems of interviewing, and to see the *fabrication* of these video “documents.” The project also maintains a critical distance from the mainstream media's use of similar tactics, such as the interview, to promote “truth” and “objective” information as well as from the notion of “public opinion.” In other words, while *The Good Life* uses strategies common to journalism and documentary film, it doesn't pretend to show “reality as it is,” but rather to expose a subjective and personal interpretation of “reality as it should be.” These “documents” are not neutral, and my mediation and ideology as well as that of the interviewees, are explicit.

Additionally, in terms of distribution, the internet is a platform and a way to reach a wider audience outside the field of art (via individuals, public libraries and cultural institutions) and to make the work available to the individuals that responded to the questions.



The Good Life was conceived in order to ask difficult questions today after years of exploitation and dependency have determined the fate of the majority of civilians throughout Latin America. This work is born out of a desire to generate an inter-generational public dialogue about the actions of the U.S. and how they are perceived today given the different degrees and levels of intervention in the region. I was interested in inquiring about the perception of political concepts such as democracy and leadership, and more importantly about their implementation, considering the critical importance that these concepts play in *our* social development. How have these concepts been constructed in countries as diverse as Honduras or Chile, where U.S. involvement has been radically different? Can one speak of democratic nations in Latin America, a geographic region defined by social inequality? What is the role of civilians and/or social movements within the different political systems of the region?

These, among many other questions, are part of an attempt to underline the need for a systematization of inquiry (political, social and historical) and rejection of abuse, manipulation and violence. The proposed system doesn't attempt to impose another hegemonic world view, but rather to magnify unheard voices and opinions about the complex set of relations that have maintained the majority of our continent poor and underrepresented. *The Good Life* modestly looks to re-claim my status, as well as that of those around me, as conscious, informed, and critical citizens and subjects.

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