

The Archive as Critique of Power and Power Relations

by Stefanie B. Kogler

In his 2004 article, *An Archival Impulse*, Hal Foster asserts that ‘archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present’.¹ Moreover, artists mediate archival material in such a way as to invite the viewer’s interpretation.² The use of archives in contemporary art does not adhere to classifications such as those applied in institutional archives, for example, the Organisation of American States (OAS).³ Foster further alludes to archival material as contingent, since their mediation seeks ‘to probe a misplaced past, [and] to ascertain what might remain for the present.’⁴ Thus, rather than merely a collection of ordered documents, the archive becomes a tool through which artists revisit the past and re-examine the role of documents in describing, for example, people and places. This becomes evident if we consider the practices of the artists Fernando Bryce (Peru) and Carlos Motta (Colombia). Both artists recontextualise the past by utilising the archive as a tool to critique power and power relations between the USA and Latin America.

Through a close engagement and re-working of documents, Bryce revisits and re-examines the aims and initiatives of the OAS in his series of 44 ink drawings titled ‘*Américas/Americas*’, 2005. The artist entered the archives of the OAS and spent considerable time selecting and reproducing primary material. In this process of ‘mimetic analysis’, one that Bryce developed himself, he not only chose selected covers and pages of the magazine *Américas*, which is produced by the OAS, but also revisited the objectives inherent in the various pages of this publication between the years 1950 and 1963. Bryce assumed the role of mediator, fragmented the contents of this archive, and brought historical documents into the present in order for them to be reviewed critically. By doing so, Bryce highlighted the use of print media in the description of culture, and the promotion of economic and

¹ Hal Foster, ‘An Archival Impulse’, *October*, No.110, (2004), p 4.

² Ibid., p.5.

³ This organisation seeks to promote political, economic and social development in the Americas since 1948. Their archives hold extensive documentation of these activities at their headquarter buildings in Washington.

⁴ Ibid., p.21.

political objectives that concern the domination of Latin America through developmental aid provided by the USA.

On the contrary, in the project '*La Buena Vida/ The Good Life*' 2005-2008, Motta creates an archive that is inspired by radical leftist ideas that reject neo-colonial modes of domination that are apparent in the power relation between the USA and Latin America. Motta acts as creator of the archive as he applies the ideas of liberation from oppression advocated by Paulo Freire from his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Motta also responds to Third Cinema's rejection of the aforementioned neo-colonial modes of domination. The latter is dealt with persuasively in their documentary *La hora de los hornos* (1968). Motta captures the personal and subjective views of the many people he interviewed in various countries and cities in Latin America, and addresses questions that he felt were not asked by the print media in the USA, where he lives.⁵ The resulting archive of video interviews, the photographic series '*Ideological Graffiti*' 2005-2011,⁶ and the installation and exhibition of this project in gallery spaces, is testament to this artist's engagement with the past and its effects upon the present. The following pages seek to answer the question of how both, Bryce and Motta, engage with the archive as a tool to revisit the past, recontextualise documents in the present, and form a persuasive critique of power relations between the USA and Latin America.

Fernando Bryce, *Américas/Americas*, 2005

Punta del Este, October 1961 (Fig.1), the cover of this issue takes as its central theme the Alliance for Progress, which sought to advocate development in Latin America with the support of US aid. Bryce also reproduced the declaration titled *What is Progress* (Fig.2) that was published in the same issue.

⁵ Interview with Carlos Motta, conducted 21/05/2012 via Skype. The cities he visited included Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Guatemala, La Paz, Managua, México City, Panamá, Santiago, San Salvador, São Paulo, and Tegucigalpa. Further, Motta asks various people the following questions: Do you have any knowledge or opinion about US foreign policy in regard to Latin America? Do you remember any instances of US intervention in Latin America? What do you think are the effects of these interventions in the local population? What is your opinion on the current form of government: democracy? How would you like to be governed? What are your expectations from a leader? *La Buena Vida*, [accessed 30/08/2012] <http://www.la-buena-vida.info/web/video>.

⁶ Carlos Motta, *Ideological Graffiti* (2005-2011), [accessed 05/01/2012], <http://carlosmotta.com/project/ideological-graffiti-2005-2011/>.

The declaration reinforces the aims of the Alliance as it states: 'Twenty nations of the hemisphere have agreed to unite their force in a great cooperative crusade for the economic and social development of Latin America'. The text also insists that the aim of the Alliance for Progress is steeped in the founding principles of the OAS, which are 'to offer to man a land of liberty, and a favourable environment for the development of his personality and the realization of his just aspirations'.⁷ It further warns that:

Using progress as a pretext, some have managed to attain their unconfessable aims of domination and oppression. Above all the idea of progress in the Hemisphere must be kept free of contaminations and euphemisms that would warp it and debase it.

The threat to the independence and liberty of the people of Latin America outlined here remains unnamed. Nevertheless, the text assumes that all men and women in the Americas aspire to the same objective, namely scientific and technological progress in order to improve people's lives. It also rejects oppression and domination as a strategy to achieve these goals, and highlights that, through cooperation with the USA, progress will be achieved. The declaration is not reproduced in its entirety, as Bryce only selects a single page from the magazine. The omission of the remaining text disrupts the reading and evidently leaves out information. It becomes apparent that the artist reproduces a selected page; however, he also points to the omission undertaken by him as he only provides a glimpse of the original document.

⁷ The founding principle of the OAS moreover states that it works toward "[...] order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence'. Who We Are, Organization of American States, 2012, [accessed 29/1/2012], <http://www.oas.org/en/about/who_we_are.asp>.

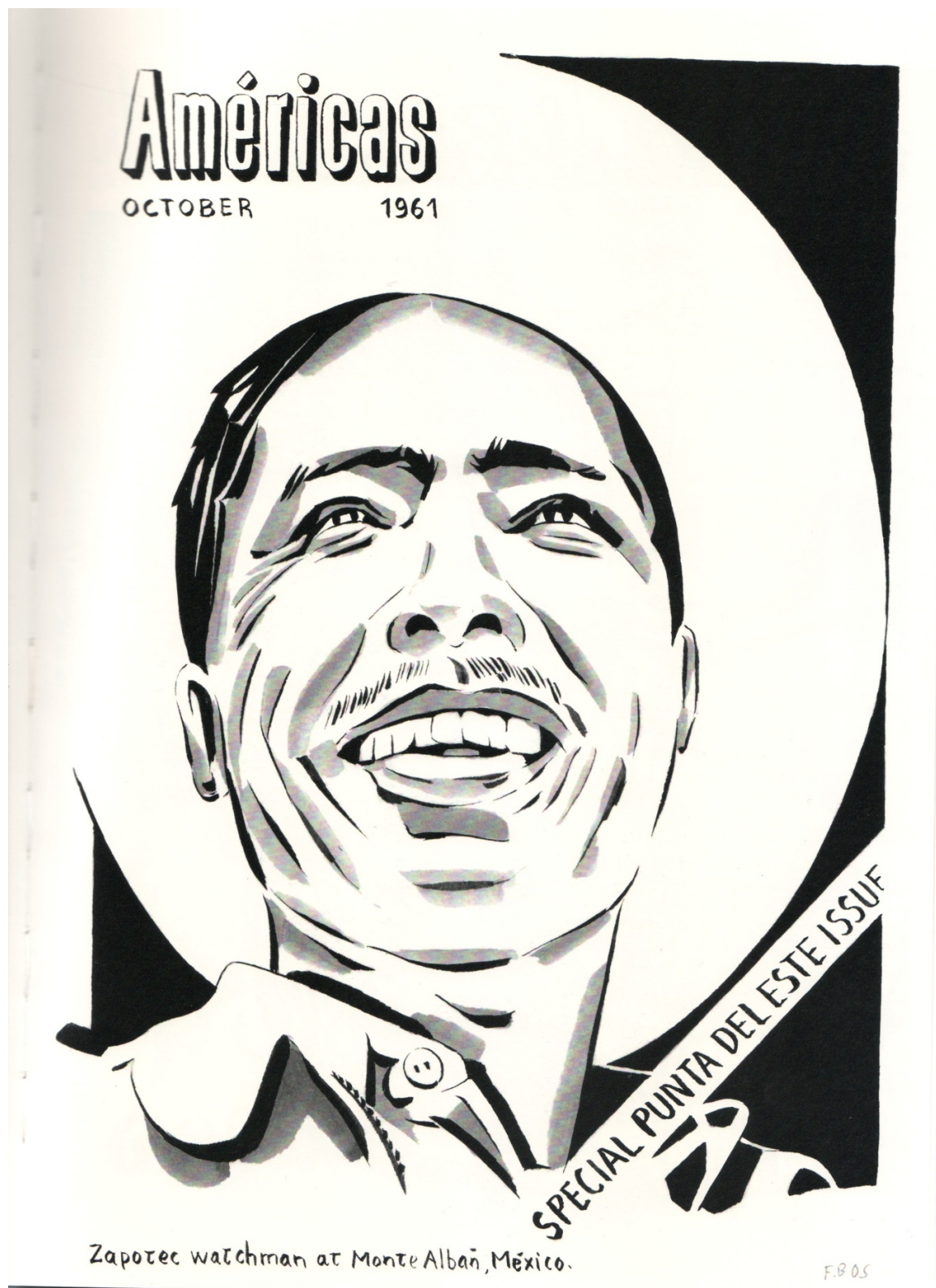


Fig.1: Fernando Bryce, from the series *Américas*, 2005, 'Special Punta del Este Issue', ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm, Courtesy: Pablo and Tinta Henning Collection, Houston, TX (USA) and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

WHAT IS PROGRESS?

No other word has exercised greater power of Fascination over the centuries than the term progress. Under the banner of progress our Western culture has realized its greatest conquests, but it is no less certain that under its shadow, using progress as a pretext, some have managed to attain their unconfessable aims of domination and oppression.

Above all the idea of progress in the Hemisphere must be kept free of contaminations and euphemisms that would warp it and debase it. No uncontrolled pseudoreformist impulse can be allowed to result in burying the Foundations of liberty, justice, and human dignity in the ruins of the past ■ that we would like to rebuild.

There is no progress, there cannot be any, where there is only one will, one standard, one doctrine; where coercion is the rule and the free and spontaneous expression of individuality is suppressed; where a police regime of constant repression enervates every form of individual initiative and confines all cultural manifestations to rigid and incapable official molds.

- Progress is not an insane race toward a future full of dazzling technological perfection, because mechanisation is not in itself, an index of perfection, nor does the dominion of industry over the rebellious forces of nature constitute a human ideal. Never will abundance of material wealth be enough to provide men with the inner well-being for which they incessantly strive.

We live in a time of increasing emphasis on science; the conquest of outer space has been made into a goal for progress and a measure of power; we proclaimed proudly that we initiated an atomic age, and, too attracted, perhaps, by the splendor of new discoveries and confused by the vertigo of the accelerated technological achievement, we may have neglected somewhat the role that man must play in this new period of history.

Twenty nations of the Hemisphere have agreed to unite their force in a great cooperative crusade for the economic and social development of Latin America. Sure of the effectiveness of the adopted plans based on the coordinated action between foreign aid and national initiative, they agreed to name the pact of Punta del Este the Alliance for Progress. Implicit in each and everyone of the paragraphs of the declaration of the Peoples of America issued on that solemn ■ occasion is the dominant aim, the final objective, that is the ultimate reason for the gigantic undertaking; the same reason is found in the very charter of the Organization of American States and is there expressed in these words: "To offer to man a land of liberty, and a favorable environment for the development of his personality and the realization of his just aspirations." The ultimate objective of progress is the benefit of man. It is for him and by him that the Alliance for Progress was conceived and created. This is so-

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Fig.2: from the series *Américas*, 2005, article 'What is Progress', ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm
Courtesy: Pablo and Tinta Henning Collection, Houston, TX (USA) and Galerie Barbara

A number of the covers reproduced by the artist consist of images of people with captions. Through these, Bryce highlights how ‘culture is described’.⁸ For example, *Punta del Este, October 1961* illustrates a portrait of a ‘Zapotec watchman at Monte Albán, México’. Unlike *What is Progress*, this cover presents the viewer with an apparently complete picture. The image depicts a smiling man, wearing a hat, who looks into the distance. The background remains black and, much like the man’s shirt and facial expression, reveals little of him or of his surroundings. He is described by the caption as belonging to the pre-Columbian culture of the Zapotec, which broadly locates him in Mexico. Captions and images like these are reproduced in numerous drawings as, for example, in *Américas, January 195,3* which depicts an ‘Indian from Pisac, Peru’ (Fig.3). The portrait shows a bearded man, who again, seems to look into the distance. He wears striped textiles and a hat. The right hand side of the image is difficult to identify as it seems to depict patterns that may be part of his dress, or could pertain to the background.

The images, reinforced by the captions, inscribe the subject of the photograph into a culture, namely that of Zapotec or Pisac, respectively. Moreover, the descriptions locate the men in the images from Mexico or Peru. No further explanations are provided in these and other images of people from Latin America. In the case of the *Indian from Pisac, Peru*, the caption goes on to state that ‘You can now motor through this country on the Pan American Highway’. The drawing further reveals that the contents of this publication include an article titled ‘The South American Way-Motoring from Caracas to Buenos Aires’, as well as a report on the provision of electricity for homes and factories in Mexico. This is juxtaposed with an article regarding ‘The search for Indians’ and Pirates Gold’, and a ‘tale’ from Chile’s Southern most area. The contents of the drawings outlined here, and those of others in the series, veer between the idea of progress and modernization and that of Latin America as a mystical place of stories, indigenous people, and hidden treasures. Since the artist entered the archives of the OAS and reinserts these images into the present, it becomes apparent that the primary material reflects Patrick Joyce’s (1999) and Gayatri Spivak’s (1985) respective stance regarding the

⁸Fernando Bryce, Carnegie International, unknown, [accessed 17/12/2011], < http://www.cmoa.org/international/the_exhibition/artist.asp?bryce>.

role of colonial archives.⁹ According to both authors, the function of archives assumed that of reinforcing the application of anthropological classifications to people and places. Joyce claims that his aided the aim of ‘supplant[ing] history as the principal colonial modality of knowledge. It identified as a subject a ‘native’ population that was to be ruled.’¹⁰ Spivak highlights how such classifications were applied in colonial outposts, and became accepted forms of descriptions of native populations and their cultures.¹¹ Bryce’s rendering of these images and their accompanying captions highlight how people and cultures are classed as subjects to be studied in the 20th Century. This provokes ideas of neo-colonial domination between the USA and Latin America, in that the descriptions of cultures and people have remained a strategy in which to identify Latin America and its native people who are in need of developmental aid provided by the USA.

⁹ Gayatri Spivak, ‘The Rami of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archives’, in Charles Merewether (ed.), *The Archive-Documents of Contemporary Art*, The MIT Press, London, 2006, p.164 and Patrick Joyce, ‘The Politics of the Liberal Archive’, *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol.12, No.2, (1999).

¹⁰ Ibid. Joyce, p.44.

¹¹ Op.cit. Spivak, p. 164.

Américas

JANUARY • • • 1953

KILOWATTS FOR PROSPERITY

New power to Mexico's
homes and factories

TREASURE HUNT

The search for Indians'
and pirates' gold

THE SOUTH AMERICAN WAY

Motoring from Caracas
to Buenos Aires

Chile's far South inspires

THE LAST FAIRY TALE

25
cents

Indian from Pisac, Peru.
You can now motor
through his country
on the Pan American
Highway.



F.B.05

Fig.3: *Américas*, January 1953, from the series *Américas*, 2005 ink on paper, 29,7cm x 21cm
Courtesy: Pablo and Tinta Henning Collection, Houston, TX (USA) and Galerie Barbara

Mimetic Analysis

The foundational act of our identity is an imaginary mimesis, an identification with an image.¹²

(Hal Foster, *Archive Without Museums*)

Bryce's mode of practice is described by him as 'mimetic analysis'.¹³ The term not only identifies the copying of primary documents by hand in ink on paper, but also encompasses the search and selection of these. Firstly, the term 'mimetic' is used to describe the imitation of the world in art and literature.¹⁴ Nevertheless, a drawing or narrative that seeks to mimetically represent reality has to, in some ways, appear distinct from the original as otherwise it is a replica.¹⁵ This is to say that, through imitation, we do not exactly copy reality, but we aim at doing so as accurately as possible. Secondly, the term analysis describes the examination of the pages and covers of *Américas* in their detailed parts. In copying them by hand, the artist engages with them closely. Through the scrutiny of images and words, the ideas and beliefs behind these are underlined. However, rather than absorbing them, Bryce transforms the documents by mimetically copying those pages that inscribe an identity through text and image. Figure 4 illustrates a recent cover of the magazine. It becomes evident that not much has changed in the representation of people as the image illustrates a smiling woman wearing a colourful headress who does not look straight into the camera. The contents of this issue describes the 'Dominican Republic's Beauty' and point to 'The Summit in Cartagena', among other contents. If we consider *Punta del Este, October 1961* and *Américas, January 1953*, the similarities are striking.

¹² Hal Foster, 'Archive without Museums', *October*, Vol.77 (1996), p.116.

¹³ Since it is challenging to come by abundant information about the artist on the internet and in exhibition catalogues, this term is the only one that has been acquired in articles and exhibition press releases: Museum Het Domein, e-flux, April 2009, [accessed 20/10/2011] < www.e-flux.com/shows/view/6648>, Dominic Eichler, 'Fernando Bryce', Frieze, June 2006, [accessed 17/12/2011], <www.frieze.com/issue/print_article/fernando_bryce/>, Unknown, 'Fernando Bryce', Artnews, May 2011, [accessed 27/01/2012], <www.artnews.org/alexanderandbonin/?exi=28745&print?>, Museo de Arte Lima, [accessed 30/08/2012], <<http://www.mali.pe/modulo/upload/1319583286NP%20Fernando%20Bryce-final%2025oct.pdf>>, The term is also mentioned in Alma Ruíz and Henri Focillon, (2007), *Poetics of the Handmade*, exh.cat., Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art.

¹⁴ Catherine Soanes (ed), *Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.566.

¹⁵ David Macey, *Dictionary of Critical Theory*, Penguin Books, London, 2001, p.254.



Fig. 4: Cover of the Magazine Américas from March/April 2012, vol. 64, No. 2. Source: http://www.oas.org/en/americas/print_editions.asp?page=1

Bryce achieves an apt critique in his ink drawings by means of a number of factors. Firstly, they match the original size of the publication. The creation of these by hand echoes their contents almost precisely; however Bryce uses black ink. Thus, by eliminating colour, which is part of a recent publication seen in figure 4, and the manual production of the drawings, the artist mediates the documents visually. He creates images that mimetically represent, but equally subvert, the originals. This is further achieved through the close analysis of the contents of each page. In other words, the reproduction of archival material moves the documents ‘...from the realm of fact [to] the realm of art’.¹⁶ Through mimetic analysis, Bryce creates imitations of the original magazine. Further, the artist engages in mediation that omits some documents over others. By accessing the archives of the OAS, he chose forty-four pages and covers of *Américas* between the years 1950 and 1963. This timeframe marks the early years of the OAS, after it was officially inaugurated in 1948.¹⁷ Again, the artist

¹⁶ Ruíz and Focillon, op.cit., p.17.

¹⁷ Our History, Organisation of American States 2012, [accessed 03/08/12] <http://www.oas.org/en/about/our_history.asp>.

mediates a period in time which is chosen by him. Thus, it becomes clear that through the act of mimetic analysis and the reinsertion of preserved documents into the present, the images and pages are recontextualised. This also shows how Bryce creates a critical view of this publication and its aims.

The examples outlined here illustrate the ‘projects promoted by strategists who attempted to take on the road to modernization’.¹⁸ The Alliance for Progress is only one such example dealt with in Bryce’s series. Furthermore, the drawings illustrate the ‘ideological landscape drenched in the positivism of the period, showing history as a linear [...] march towards progress’.¹⁹ If we consider *What is Progress*, these intentions are underlined through the text published in the original magazine from 1961. Moreover, *Américas*, January 1953, although from a time before the Alliance for Progress was signed, also illustrates the ideas of the OAS in their quest to develop Latin America.

The use of the magazine *Américas* as a vehicle to promote progress and modernization becomes apparent.²⁰ The illustrations and the accompanying texts show a paternalistic stance toward Latin America on the part of the USA. However, Bryce’s manual reproduction of these images in ink disrupts the objectives of the original publication. Through the meticulous and repetitive process of drawing, he shows how ‘facts are constructed’.²¹ For example, the image of the *Indian from Pisac, Peru* and the *Zapotec Watchman from Monte Albán, Mexico* are constructed through their description, which attempts to state their origin factually. He critiques the construction of subjects through the archive by reinserting historical documents from the past into the present. Rather than identifying with the images presented here, the artist creates a critique of their intentions to convert people of Latin America into subjects according to anthropological classifications, which serve to reinforce neo-colonial domination by the USA.

¹⁸ Martin Janda, *De Frente al Sol*, exhibition 18th Sept- 30th October 2012, [accessed 17/12/2011] <www.artnews.org/martinjanda/?exi=24488&print>.

¹⁹ Ruíz and Focillon, op.cit., p.17.

²⁰ This aim has not changed since its inception; neither have the use of images of people from Latin America and their description which echoes that of the examples cited here. *Américas*, Organisation of American States 2012, [accessed 24/08/2012], <<http://www.oas.org/en/americas/>>.

²¹ Carnegie International, op.cit.

Carlos Motta, *La Buena Vida/ The Good Life* 2005-2008

Carlos Motta engages with archives in a different manner. He conceived of *La Buena Vida/the Good Life* as ‘a loosely constructed archive’.²² Motta did not seek to adhere to archival standards or the application of anthropological ideas in order to create this repository.²³ He insists that he approached this project from the field of art; therefore, he did not employ prescribed strategies to the field research or the classification of the collected data, such as those applied in sociology or anthropology.²⁴ According to the artist, the project does, however, borrow from these fields. Motta intended to create an archive of oral history that is not subject to strict classifications or serves to construct knowledge. As the interviews are at the core of the project, Motta sought to establish a dialogue that would highlight the individual’s subjectivity and their personal understanding of Latin America’s relationship with the USA between 2005-2008.

Motta’s project is born of an interest in, on the one hand, 1960s film-making that responded to experiences of neo-colonialism in Latin America and, on the other, a radical pedagogy that, also in the 1960s, questioned the existing power structures. Moreover, this pedagogy advocated a change in the way people from less fortunate sectors in society thought of themselves as individuals, others and their situation. Firstly, ‘*La hora de los hornos*’ (1968), by Argentinean Third Cinema filmmakers Fernando ‘Pino’ Solanas and Octavio Getino, is a documentary that propagates a radical opposition to foreign intervention and against the existing oligarchic power structure prevalent in Argentina, as well as in the rest of Latin America.²⁵ The critique against neo-colonialism and the systematic economic, political and cultural control imposed from abroad is offset with a call to revolutionize and liberate Latin America from such interventions, and the resulting dependency on foreign influence and aid. The film highlights the gap in wealth distribution between the oligarchies that own most of the land, and people living in poverty in cities and the country-side who are shut out from social welfare and an adequate standard of living. *La hora de los hornos*, moreover, condemns discrimination on the

²² Op.cit., Interview with Carlos Motta

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *La hora de los hornos*, Film, 1968, [accessed 8/9/2012] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glEN7FOLsJI>

grounds of race and class, which it claims is facilitated by the eagerness of the oligarchy to align itself to a white, middle class European economic, cultural and political system, which perpetuates dependency upon foreign influence and investment. Solanas and Getino are clear in their message to move power to the people in order to assert control over their politics, economy, and culture.

Secondly, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). In this seminal work, the author seeks to raise political consciousness and advocates a radical shift away from oppression. His proposed theory ‘makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation.’²⁶ Freire cites reflection and dialogue as a vital tool in working toward a revolution and subsequent liberation. According to the author, a continuous dialogue will create a ‘revolutionary consciousness’ in people, which will lead to a moment of change.²⁷ He does not, however, place the responsibility of leadership at the hands of one person or a group, as Freire is convinced that this would lead to populism, and to a situation in which the role of oppressor and oppressed is once again reinstated.²⁸ Rather, Freire seeks to place responsibility and power with the people as, only through a common goal and shared ideas, can real change happen.

Moreover, Freire articulates his views on foreign intervention disguised as providing aid and development. He states that ‘[d]omination involves invasion [...] with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend’.²⁹ This echoes the strategies and aims of the OAS, and the Alliance for Progress in particular, in the alleged effort to improve the lives of the people in Latin America. Freire claims that due to the control imposed from abroad by initiatives such as these, development is seriously stifled as Latin America’s ‘political, economic and cultural decision-making power is located outside itself, in the invader society’.³⁰ This further reflects Third Cinema’s critique concerning neo-colonial modes of domination, foreign intervention and control imposed by the USA.

²⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.25.

²⁷ Ibid., p.106.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

³⁰ Ibid., p.130.

Motta creates a clearly outlined theoretical framework for *La Buena Vida*, around which he creates an archive that records the effects of foreign intervention according to today's citizens of Latin America, as well as his own beliefs regarding this topic. Motta sought to pose questions that he felt were not investigated by television and print media.³¹ These included the perception of democracy, leadership and foreign intervention.³² In order to address these themes, Motta travelled extensively throughout Latin America to survey the political and historical awareness of people he encountered in the streets of the many cities he visited. The artist does not purport to provide solutions to the problem of economic dominance, the failure of democracy, or social injustice. Motta's aim is 'to underline the need for systematization of inquiry (political, social and historical) and rejection (of abuse, manipulation and violence)'.³³ Motta's project shows that, far from being mere holding places, archives are implicated with aims and ideological values from their inception. He acts as creator of this archive, as well as its archivist. He fulfils this role through the selection and editing of videos and essays that he then publishes online, and in hardcopy.

Installation and Interaction

La Buena Vida has been exhibited in various museums, galleries and art institutions in Colombia, Argentina, the USA, and Europe.³⁴ The installation of the video monitors showing the interviews mirrors that of the Pnyx, an open space in ancient Athens in which citizens would gather to debate

³¹ Op.cit., Interview with the artist.

³² Do you have any knowledge or opinion about US foreign policy in regard to Latin America? Do you remember any instances of US intervention in Latin America? What do you think are the effects of these interventions in the local population? What is your opinion on the current form of government: democracy? How would you like to be governed? What are your expectations from a leader? *La Buena Vida*, [accessed 30/08/2012] <http://www.la-buena-vida.info/web/video>.

³³ Carlos Motta, 'Postscript: Civilization or Barbarity', in Eva Díaz (ed.), *La Buena Vida/The Good Life*, Art in General, New York, 2008, p.17.

³⁴ Exhibitions of 'La Buena Vida': October 2006, rum46, Aarhus, Denmark; November 2006, Estudio Abierto, Buenos Aires, Argentina; August 2007, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Swing Space Program, New York, USA; January-March 2008, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, USA; September 2008, *Democracy in America* an exhibition organized by Creative Time, New York, USA; September 2008, *Ours: Democracy in the Age of Branding*, and exhibition organized by The Vera List Centre for Art and Politics at the Sheila Johnson Design Centre, Parsons, New York, USA; March 2009, Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, New York, USA; March 2009, La Fundación Alzate Avendano, Bogotá, Colombia; April 2009, Fabbbrica Europa, Florence, Italy; July 2009, *FEEDFORWARD: Angel of History* an exhibition organized by Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial, Gijón, Spain; Chronology, *La Buena Vida*, [accessed 30/08/2012] < <http://la-buena-vida.info/about/chronology.shtml> >.

legislation and make decisions on judicial matters.³⁵ The monitors are placed on wooden structures in a semi-circle allowing the visitor to assume a silent role in this gathering as they watch the videos. According to the artist, this installation seeks to perform a participatory function similar to that in ancient Greece; although, of course, the viewer participates through his presence rather than through discussion. Nevertheless, by creating the idea of participation in this installation, the project becomes interactive and promotes communication between the viewer and Motta's archive.



Fig.5.: Carlos Motta, *La Buena Vida*, 2005-2008, view of exhibition installation,
Source: <http://la-buena-vida.info/about/installation-description.shtml>

The series of twenty-two photographs titled '*Ideological Graffiti*' (2005-2011), together with video stills and other photographs, are also displayed. The images were taken by Motta in various cities in

³⁵ About the Installation, *La Buena Vida*, website, [accessed 8/9/2012] <http://www.la-buena-vida.info/about/installation-description.shtml>

Latin America. The graffiti, stencils and slogans contain messages about the rejection of US domination over Latin America, and echo the critique of such current political power structures.³⁶ They are arranged according to varying categories such as ‘political graffiti’ and ‘public monuments’.³⁷ These loose groupings, which do not adhere to a strict archival practice, guide the visitor through the space and, according to Motta, ‘demarcate an active relationship between [...] cultural and ideological iconographies.’³⁸ The latter is particularly visible in the series mentioned above. *Untitled (Against Imperialism, Union of Our America)* shows a wall mural that rejects US imperialism. The message in this graffiti reads: *Against Imperialism, Union of Our America*. It further illustrates the domination exerted over Latin America through shackles that run across the continent, but are split off and broken between North and South America. The graffiti calls for united action against domination from abroad and is clear in conveying this message.



Fig. 6: ‘Untitled (Against Imperialism, Union of Our America)’, Caracas, Venezuela (2008), 11 x 14”, Inkjet Prints, from the series ‘Ideological Graffiti’ (2005-2011)

³⁶ Carlos Motta, *Ideological Graffiti* (2005-2011), [accessed 05/01/2012], <http://carlosmotta.com/project/ideological-graffiti-2005-2011/>.

³⁷ La Buena Vida/The Good Life, [accessed 09/12/2012] <http://www.la-buena-vida.info/about/installation-description.shtml>

³⁸ Ibid.

On the contrary, the significance of the image in *Untitled* may be more challenging to unlock. This image evokes that of Che Guevara's iconic photograph by Alberto Korda from 1960 (Fig.8) which, over the years, has come to adorn clothing, posters and other printed media. However, in this graffiti, Guevara's face is replaced with that of a skull. The immediately visible markers that point to Che pertain to the beret and unkempt hair which remind us of the original photograph. The crimson red background is a copy of the stylized image of Guevara (Fig.9) which uses this colour to contrast the image of Guevara's face with the background. Thus, one interpretation could include a critique of the the use of Guevara's image in popular culture. In this case, the image states that this has been 'done to death' and is no longer effective. In other words, the idea of liberation from domination is a dead endeavour since it has become commodified rather than posing a strategy through which domination can be effectively countered.



Fig.7: 'Untitled', Managua, Nicaragua (2007), 11x14", Inkjet Prints, from the series '*Ideological Graffiti*' (2005-2011)



Fig.8: *Che Guevara*, Alberto Korda , 1960
source:<http://workerdandy.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/che-guevaras-style-disaster.html>



Fig.9: A later, stylized version of Guevara's photograph above, source:
<http://www.2oceansvibe.com/2012/10/10/che-guevaras-handwritten-diary-released-online/>

These and the many other images are not displayed with captions on the walls, as may be expected. Motta leaves them for the viewer to interpret. This resonates with Foster's assertion that archival artists do not present the viewer with a closed system of descriptions and classifications. This omission of potential additional information is in contrast with archival practices that seek to describe and classify documents. Rather, Motta invites the visitor to engage with this archive in its physical manifestation, namely in the form of the exhibition. In this sense, the visitor participates in Motta's archive and the ensuing examinations. Thus, rather than applying classification and description to the contents of this archive, the artist problematises the issues of domination, democracy, a radical pedagogy, neo-colonialism, etc. through an archival experience that takes place in the gallery. Motta's *La Buena Vida* reflects a desire to come to terms with an askew world order, social injustice, and economic dominance imposed from the USA. The need for a leader who strives to do the right thing is recurrent in the interviews.³⁹ Motta does not seek 'to show 'reality as it is'', but rather to expose a subjective and personal interpretation of 'reality as it should be'.⁴⁰ The artist does not claim objectivity. He is clear that this archive echoes the radical ideas of Third Cinema and Freire.

Mediating the Archive

Bryce's role is that of the user of the archive since he mediates material that illustrates the application of supposed facts about the people of Latin America. The ideas promoted through the original publication sought to improve the intercultural understanding between all countries in the Americas. It further promoted initiatives such as the Alliance for Progress which took steps in order to bring development to Latin America. As Bryce fragments the contents of the institutional archives of the OAS, he unearths the use of print media in disseminating ideas about people from Latin America and the apparent importance the USA plays in the development of this region. Bryce does not copy whole articles, but singular pages that present the viewer with an incomplete text as seen in *What is Progress?* (Fig.2). This disruption of information is in contrast with the efforts to employ a closed

³⁹ Carlos Motta, 'Postscript: Civilization or Barbarity', op.cit., p.15.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.16.

system of categorization in the numerous images the artist reproduced. Through the application of mimetic analysis, the artist deconstructs these ideas and aims. As mediator, Bryce acquired a role in which he moves documents from the archive into the field of art. He thereby performs documents to an audience that engages with the artist's interpretations and forms a critique of the power relation between the USA and Latin America.

Motta creates an archive that reflects his view regarding foreign intervention in Latin America. He emphasises the subjective stance of not only his ideas, but also those of the people he interviews. According to the artist, the project has already become anachronistic, since it reflects people's opinions and reactions to political developments between 2005 and 2008.⁴¹ However, as a repository of oral history, *La Buena Vida* is a contingent archive, the meaning of which not only reflects the mood during a particular period (2005-2008), but will acquire new meaning over time. This is due to the reaction of individuals to political issues at the time of the interviews and the changing circumstances in each country as time passes. Motta's archive presents us with a view that does not originate in institutional practices, such as those of the OAS. Rather, the artist creates an archive that reflects his concerns and views. The installation of this repository, according to the specifications outlined here, becomes a vital strategy in which the ideas and values inherent in Motta's project are communicated with the visitors who enter this archive. Through this he determines, not only the values and beliefs of his repository, but also mediates its contents to an audience that engages critically with it.

Both artists examine and critique the power relationship between the USA and Latin America from the mid 20th century onwards. Their practices use the archive as a tool of communication which seeks to evaluate and revisit the past in order to reflect on present conditions. The resulting artworks speak metaphorically through the archive and therefore communicate with the viewer in that they engage critically with issues that pertain to neo-colonialism. This theme is not only historically pertinent, but remains firmly at the heart of US/Latin American power relations.

⁴¹ Op.cit., Interview with the artist

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