

The Evening Class

"Cinema is the evening class for discriminating adults."--Ousmane Sembene

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2006

SFIFF49 2006—*The Dignity of the Nobodies* (2005)

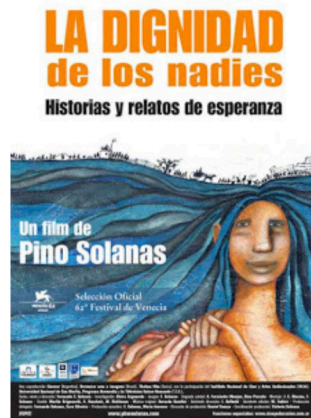


The U.S. premiere of [Fernando Solanas' *The Dignity of the Nobodies* \(*La dignidad de de los nadies, 2005*\)](#) is being presented at the 49th edition of the San Francisco International Film Festival in association with the United Nations Association Film Festival and Global Exchange. The second in a projected series of four documentaries dealing with the plight of Argentina, *The Dignity of the Nobodies* is—as Miguel Pendás pens for the program catalog—“activist cinema at its best:

passionate, informative and uncompromising.” Pendás concludes: “The film's power and immediacy make it feel like a hopeful forecast of things to come.”

Imagine! A documentary that testifies to hope!! *The Dignity of the Nobodies* has arrived on these bleak shores none too soon.

“It was hard to imagine,” Solanas writes regarding the genesis of the documentary, “that the small women farmers, ignorant of banking or political affairs, would be able to organize a vigorous and original resistance movement confronting banks and stopping over a thousand auction sales. The neighborhood or community soup kitchens, community clinics, bakeries and other social initiatives created by the neighbors to give an answer to poverty and hunger. The dozens of silence marches staged by relatives of the victims of police mafias which managed to unmask the murderers and send them to trial. The factories revived by their former workers showing that under self-management and without the hierarchical structures of managers and foremen, they could produce with efficiency and quality.”



All these “stories” are passionately recorded in *The Dignity of the Nobodies* and any American—fearful of where our so-called

leaders are taking this country—should become cognizant of these grass root strategies and project their own future involvement into them.

Where a feature film like *Obaba* creates a narrative fiction out of the documentary process, Solanas inverts the assertion: "**The Dignity of the Nobodies** is not only testimonial cinema, it is not fiction either. It starts from reality but uses procedures from other genres, and on telling characters' facts and stories it approaches fiction. In **The Dignity of the Nobodies** I tried to fuse genres, to approach real facts to narrative stories, to use procedures of the documentary together with those of fiction or of essay cinema. Its narrative structure resembles that of an open book with tales, chronicles and stories, looking for the testimonial to blend with the poetic, the essay with the testimonies, and the characters with life. The idea of the genres has been reversed and the limits between fiction and the documentary cinema are difficult to specify."



Whereas I was entertained by the stately whimsy of *Obaba*, and its play on who is seeing who, it remains a philosophical reverie on structures of memory, an artistic construct I can look at, enjoy, write about, and ultimately dismiss. With **The Dignity of the Nobodies**, however, memory and the documentary process forge a progressive alliance, engaging me at a deep level. "The tragedy," Solanas explains, "pushed me to preserve memory against oblivion." These stories are not philosophical musings; they are practical stratagems for survival! Here, voting is accomplished with the feet, with action, and not by passive cooperation with structured party politics. Here, *Basta!* Becomes a rallying cry. Enough! Enough.

But it is precisely by his bringing the resistance down to personal testimonials that Solanas has achieved universality and solidarity. Each character—Martin, the writer delivery-rider, Toba the teacher, Antonia and Chipi who run the poor soup kitchen, Margarita and Colinche who provide for their children through scavenging and gleaning, Silvia and Carola in the public hospital, Lucy who organized farmer wives against the banks' auctions of their farms, Dario martyred by the police mafia and Claudia his fiance, Gustavo, the young priest turned social reactionary—are introduced via *coplas*, which have their origin in the 19th century *payada*. The *payador* was the chronicler gaucho who traveled through the pampa passing on the news in verse to the music of his guitar.

I was entertained by *Obaba*; but, I was profoundly moved by **The Dignity of the Nobodies**. A must-see at this year's festival!

Posted by [Michael Guillen](#) at [4/15/2006 01:50:00 PM](#)

Labels: [Argentine Cinema](#), [Fernando Solanas](#), [SFIFF](#)