

Paulina Jeziorek & Graw Böckler on their project „After The Crisis“ with stills from the interviews.

Paulina Jeziorek: You decided to initiate a conversation on crisis that turns out to have a trans-continental dimension. Europeans talk to Argentines in order to find out what might be ahead of them. Is that what the videos "After the crisis" (and "Before the crisis") consist of?



Graw Böckler: Yes. We are used to living in a rich society. We felt kind of unprepared and inexperienced regarding a major economical crisis. People from Argentina already experienced state bankruptcy in 2001. We wanted to know what it meant for them, for their friends and family.

Who exactly did you talk to in Argentina?

We didn't want to ask people who were especially involved in the events of 2001 - just people who are as near to us as possible: friends and friends of friends.



If I think about the crisis that is supposedly in front of us through a prism of history or current media information, I associate it with a wild beast. Do you think it is important to tame the beast a bit in our minds by getting practical (or unpractical?;) pieces of advice from Argentinians?



Yes, after having talked so much about state bankruptcy with our Argentinean friends, we feel kind of relieved. Of course the disaster in Europe might have another dimension. Still we feel now having gained first hand knowledge about how to deal with it - practically and emotionally. On the other hand we are not sure if our friends did not make up their stories just to make us feel better. There was a contradiction between what happened to them and how they approached it. Maybe their optimism was a strategy to survive a dark period. *But* when we were visiting Buenos Aires for the first time in 2003 there was an incredible creative and animated atmosphere. No one had money in the art scene, but people were just doing things together in a light and joyful spirit - at least that was the way we experienced it.



So, what happens to the paradise birds (artists in well-off society) when a tsunami hits or when they face the so-called beast?



Strangely enough, many people we talked to said that the time of the crisis was the best time of their lives. Struggling seems fun when you succeed. Maybe we just didn't meet the victims. They might be not part of the scene anymore.

Before you went to Argentina and we were working on questions – I was wondering – what can be a more general reaction to crisis of people who have an inside need of artistic expression. Will fear make them act more practical and focus on developing ways of survival or the contrary... ? It appears to be the later. Arts schools were full of new students during this time... What other changes did the crisis bring in the field of art that you noticed?



People experienced that material goods may disappear quickly. They were looking for something sustainable and started to go into the arts. Other changes: artists had to use the materials they could afford. We couldn't find much video art after the crisis in Buenos Aires. It was very difficult to find imported products, like video tapes.



The question might be now – what does it mean to become a victim of crisis and what does it mean not to become a victim of crisis?



Everybody will have a bite of the shit sandwich.

Did the Argentinians change their lifestyle very much after the crisis? Do they still buy brand name clothes or other brand name things?

Our friends were telling us that they used to travel to Miami for shopping tours before state bankruptcy hit the country. Some of them still wear brand name clothes but they definitely do not travel to Miami to buy them. There is a market a bit outside of Buenos Aires where copies of brand name clothes, movies, music etc. are sold. Argentina is, in a way, already copyright free. Everybody uses cracked software. There are almost no record stores in Buenos Aires since all the music is downloaded. Fashion designers from Buenos Aires got careers, maybe also because imported brands were just too expensive. We bought Argentinean designer clothes for the price of H&M. These times are over now because of the ongoing inflation.



Argentina is a good-looking and sexy society. People have their style. It hasn't a lot to do with being well-off, or does it?



If you look at a person from the outside, he or she might be sexy irrespective of social status. In the moment contact gets more personal, all the social codification like education, wealth, status etc. come into effect: it turns out that being well-off is sexy! During our project, we were not so much interested in this part of being sexy - more in a look of love which adds some credibility to spoken words.



Society is always prone to being manipulated by means of the official face of crisis before as well as after a crisis... That's f.e. how nationalisms construct history. Things you said earlier about optimism and joyful spirit of Argentineans show that understanding of unofficial or let's call it biographic faces of the crisis should never be detached from collective approach...



People underestimate their own role. Society consists of individuals like you and me. There is always a talk about the politicians, the bankers, the corrupt people, the others... but if I look at me or people I know, for example, in the art world... We like to work with people because they are our friends. Artists and curators build groups and invite each other to participate in shows. It's corrupt.

I have a feeling that a big part of society (especially in Poland) still believes in a beautiful American Dream, even though we are about to face the collapse of the system and a serious hangover. In „After the crisis“ Argentinesans talk mostly about the moment of collapse and straight after, yes?



I don't know if it's beautiful. The American Dream never appealed to me. It is very much related towards money. But the things I am dreaming of are all for free. During state bankruptcy, you will have to pay for the materialistic dreams of others. Even though you are not speculating with a financial risk, you are already involved anyway! We learned from our Argentinean friends that being political just means being realistic about your own participation in society. About the second part of your question: We tried to bring our interview partners back in time to the day when the banks closed and the protests started. It was a way to make them revive their state of being since most of them were not reflecting upon it anymore. Ten years had already passed.



You mentioned about „being realistic about your own participation in society“? What did you mean by that?



Being political is realistic in two ways: To understand that you, as a person, will be victimized by political developments eventually and that you can join with others to actively change political decisions as well. Some of our interview partners experienced both ways.

Is it possible to feel somehow safe during crisis?

I imagine crisis to be big stress. If you can cope with it or suppress your fear, it makes you act a lot, which might make you feel safe indeed.



A few adjectives that could describe the stereotype of a western person - successful, individualistic, fit, connected, security-centered, comfort loving, rational, clean, attractive... Which of the features, in your opinion, does the crisis hit first, when thinking of the Argentinean experience?



Many of our friends organized themselves in artists collectives. So "individualistic" might be the first to go.



Did you have any worries concerning your work in Argentina?



That one of us falls in love with an interviewee.

