



EL FUTURO PERFECTO

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A film by Nele Wohlatz



VIENNALE

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Storyline

Xiaobin, a young Chinese in Buenos Aires, has to deal with the contradictions of her new everyday life. She does so, using the film as a rehearsal room.

A film by Nele Wohlatz

Produced by Murillo Cine & Nele Wohlatz

With the support of Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) and Mecenazgo Cultural Buenos Aires

65 min.

Color

DCP 5.1

1:1:85

OV in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese

Subtitles in English and French

Year of production: 2016

Cast

Xiaobin Zhang, Saroj Kumar Malik, Mian Jiang, Dong Xi Wang, Nahuel Pérez Biscayart

Written & Directed

Nele Wohlatz

Executive Producer

Cecilia Salim

Cinematographers

Roman Kasseroller
& Agustina San Martín

Editor

Ana Godoy

Sound

Nahuel Palenque

Associate Producer

Gustavo Beck

Producers

Cecilia Salim & Nele Wohlatz



MURILLO
CINE

INCAA
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE CINE Y ARTES AUDIOVISUALES

MECENAZGO CULTURAL
BUENOS AIRES

TALENTS

BAL
BUENOS AIRES LAB

DOCMONTEVIDEO
DOCUMENTAL DE BUENOS AIRES



Synopsis

Xiaobin is 17 and unable to speak a word in Spanish, when she arrives to Argentina. However, just a few days later, she's already given a new name, Beatriz, and a job at a Chinese supermarket. Her family lives in the parallel universe of their laundromat, apart from the Argentineans. Hiding from her parents, Xiaobin starts saving money and signs up at a language school. Whatever she

learns in Spanish class, she tries it out on the street. After learning the lesson 'Setting up an appointment' she sets up a date with an Indian client of the supermarket. She can hardly communicate herself with Vijay. Nevertheless, they start a secret relationship. After practicing the conditional, the tense of the hypothetical future, imagination springs into her new

life and Xiaobin starts to think about her future. What could happen if her parents find out about her Indian boyfriend? The better her Spanish gets, the more Xiaobin intervenes in the writing of the film. Her Chinese classmates comment on the ongoing as a choir. *The Perfect Future* becomes a rehearsal room for the new life of Xiaobin.





Director's Note

Language books teach us phrases like, *"The dog is grey. The cat is white"*, or *"Mary talks to her clients over the phone and sells plane tickets. She is a travel agent."* We didn't write these phrases, nor do they necessarily help us in what we actually want to say. They are texts for a role still unknown and therefore uncomfortable to us.

It takes weeks or month until an actor assumes ownership of a new text and a new role, and even more until an immigrant is able to assume ownership of the role given by his new language. This is what also happened to me right after I moved from Germany to Argentina in 2009. I began to think I would never become part of this society, just like Xiaobin, who once said to me: *"When I'm waiting at the bus-stop, I want to look like everybody else. When I have money, I'm going to have my eyes and cheeks operated."*

In Buenos Aires, I started to teach German. The first time I saw Xiaobin, she was performing in a play staged by Chinese students at the language school. She had just begun to study Spanish and it was a tremendous effort for her just to say simple phrases. All of her concentration was focused on her speech; her body only expressed a minimum amount of gestures. Her text

was fictitious, but her act of speech was real, a testimony of the inner controversy of her new citizenship, her new language and her new space. It was different from the acting of nonprofessional actors I had seen so far. We went through a long process of rehearsals, first with Xiaobin, later on with other Chinese students at the language school, in order to explore this ambiguous speech where you can't tell if someone is performing a language or a role.

Just a step away from adulthood, Xiaobin is 18 years old and she feels the need to find her Argentine self, even against her parents' wishes. In Argentina, to her studying means a possibility to scale up her social condition. Like an actress who knows how to confront the uncertainty of a new role, Xiaobin confronts each new stage fearlessly putting things to a test. The script was being written together with Xiaobin, in a process in which she could test and re-invent herself.

Consequently, the film also involves her future, just as she imagines it today, constantly introducing variations. *The Future Perfect* is about the adaptation process of a foreigner to her new society, and it's her condition as an immigrant what determines her acting style, the dramatic structure and the film device.



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9.00
17.00
25.00
20.00



Press

*"It takes skill to successfully handle heavy issues with a light touch, but that's what German-born, Argentina-based writer-director Nele Wohlatz pulls off with her delightfully original documentary/fiction hybrid, *The Future Perfect*. This wryly amusing, intriguingly stylized tale of a Chinese teenager in Buenos Aires was named best debut feature when premiering in the 'Filmmakers of the Present' sidebar at Locarno – beating a 20-strong field that included no less a rival than Golden Leopard winner *Godless*. (...) *The Future Perfect* has successfully touched on complex themes of immigration, identity and the role of language in personal development and social interactions – all on an obviously minuscule budget, and in a running time exactly half that of, say, *Suicide Squad*."*

Neil Young (Hollywood Reporter)

"Sharply self-reflexive, with a serious underlay of philosophical inquiry, the film features a deliciously downbeat performance from Zhang Xiaobin. It's simply a delight to find a film that's so insightful about issues of identity, exile, language and self—and at the same time, so elegantly funny."

Jonathan Romney (Film Comment)

*"Few films this year have felt as assured as Nele Wohlatz's lovable Bressonian comedy of manners *El Futuro Perfecto*, which just won the First Feature prize at the Locarno Film Festival. At sixty-five minutes, it was not only the briskest film playing at the festival but also one of the sharpest. A comedy about a Chinese expat living in Argentina, Wohlatz's film proved a kind of antidote to festival fatigue: It's funny, straightlaced, and smart—a wry, surehanded spin on the documentary form with a subtle but rigorous use of offscreen space. And like the best of Bresson, it depends in large part on the presence of the lead nonactor, in this case the great first-time performer Zhang Xiaobin."*

Christopher Small (Fandor)

*"La película -que evita el pintoresquismo y los lugares comunes- jamás deja de fascinar. Hay tantas búsquedas e ideas en *El futuro perfecto* que se le perdona su "presente imperfecto". Se trata de un ensayo, una reconstrucción ficcional y un diario íntimo sobre lo que significa para una joven extranjera conocer y ganarse un lugar en una urbe hostil como Buenos Aires."*

Diego Battle (Otros Cines)

"Eine poetische Liebes- und Anverwandlungsgeschichte, in die erkennbar auch Wohlatz' persönliche Erfahrungen als Fremde in Argentinien einfließen. Von diesem Film wird mehr in Erinnerung bleiben, als von den Gewinnern eines eher durchwachsenen Locarno-Festivaljahres."

Rüdiger Suchsland (SWR)



Language As a Rehearsal Space: *Excerpts from an interview with Nele Wohlatz in MUBI*

NOTEBOOK: Like your main characters Xiaobin (Xiaobin Zhang) and Vijay (Saroj Kumar Malik), you also migrated from another country to Argentina. How much does the film mirror your own experience and how did you conceive your approach as a filmmaker to this subject?

NELE WOHLATZ: When I first had the idea for the film, I was living in Argentina for 3 or 4 years and I was still confused about myself being part of that society. Living far away from my mother tongue and not being able to catch the finer parts of my everyday language made me feel inept as a film director. So I thought, if I don't feel part of the inner society, I should make something out of my foreign perspective. I happened to teach German to make a living, so I asked in the language school if I could interview the students from the Spanish classes. They told me, "no problem," but that there were almost only Chinese students studying Spanish. The Chinese culture was completely unknown to me, and it intrigued me to have a protagonist who would be a foreigner to me and the other way around. There would always be a distance, which would reflect the distance I wanted to talk about, the distance between a foreigner and her new world.

Later, during the shooting, I realized that what we were actually doing was creating something beautiful in a badly spoken language, creating sense within a very poor language. That making this film was also about appropriating our new language.

NOTEBOOK: Already the title, *El futuro perfecto*, announces a desire to freely present different paths for the same narrative. It feels like your film enjoys playing with fiction and fictionalizing real, quotidian events. What was your process writing and structuring the film?

WOHLATZ: Language schools could be understood as rehearsal stages for a new identity after immigration. That's how I came up with idea of using the scenes in the language school as the structuring elements of the film. You have the scenes of the life of Xiaobin since her arrival to Buenos Aires, and you have the scenes in a language school where we see a group of Chinese students rehearsing their new text, which is the Spanish language. What Xiaobin studies in school, she tries out on the street, and the plot moves forward. Every time she learns something new, she can do more things and more things could happen in the film. That was the basic idea for the script. Xiaobin and I started spending a lot of

time together, going to places in the city, to the movies... We talked about our experiences as foreigners in Buenos Aires, and I collected all the small anecdotes, observations and comments that might be interesting. She became someone I liked a lot and I became someone important to her, so there was a mutual influence from the beginning, which wouldn't allow to distinguish too much between reality and imagination, fictionalization of real events. For the dramatic structure, I asked Pío Longo for help. But how would we make Xiaobin an actress of her own life? How would this process of fictionalizing her own life work? We had to try out what we were writing, so we started rehearsing: Xiaobin and Pío would act small dialogues we wrote based on the things she told me, and we tried to find out what worked, what wouldn't work. The rehearsals were also acting classes. In the second year, I gave an acting workshop for Chinese Spanish students at the language school. I thought of Xiaobin's classmates as a Greek chorus that interrupts the life of the protagonist and comments on it, judges or predicts. I had to invent "Spanish exercises" that would keep moving forward the plot, based on the more performative aspects



of language classes. When I felt that it was the right moment, we started to shoot the scenes. The classroom you see in the film was our rehearsal space; most of the Chinese actors in the film were participants of the workshop.

NOTEBOOK: At some point in the narrative a love story emerges. It feels unique because the new couple needs to create its very own dynamics to communicate and to understand each other, while also dealing with their respective cultural differences. Could you comment on your decision to make Vijay, a man from India, Xiaobin's love interest?

WOHLATZ: The love story is there because it's a part of Xiaobin's life, but for several reasons we discarded the possibility to shoot with her real boyfriend. Malik is the only main cast in the film who doesn't represent himself—and that was interesting. The relationship between Vijay and Xiaobin kept being a mystery to me; I couldn't explain it. Malik is totally different from the real Vijay: he's from another Hindu cast, he's a cook, his marriage was arranged by his family, he has a child. I think him being another person saved me from trying to tell the "real love story," it helped to be descriptive. I tried to focus on the aspects that reveal something about Xiaobin's process of arrival in her new society: that

she chooses someone in a "limbo position" like her, not from Argentina, neither from China, as a foreigner also in a similar situation and therefore equal to her. That handicaps like not being able to speak the official language can work as a bond. That she's looking forward to confront her parents with a provocation, as a part of her coming-of-age conflict.

NOTEBOOK: The daily life of Xiaobin in Argentina seems shaped by the vocabulary and grammar she learns from the books at her Spanish course. But as Xiaobin renames herself Beatriz/Sabrina her character gains new layers. What is the role of language in the film and how does it limit her character? How do these limits trigger the development of something altogether new for her?

WOHLATZ: I think that language determines us, that we can only think as far as words allow us to do so. Maybe that's why it's so humiliating to start living in new language as an adult. So I thought of Xiaobin's character as determined by her new language, and as a character evolving throughout the film as she speaks more Spanish. At the beginning, there are hardly any dialogues at all, since she doesn't speak any Spanish. In that part, the *mise en scène* is also more schematic: scenes at the beginning don't develop much in time,

they are mainly told in only one shot, as if they were written by a short memory without too many details.

When Xiaobin starts studying Spanish she receives a new name, Beatriz, like a first hypothetical new identity. When I knew Xiaobin, she presented herself as "Beatriz" to me, but it was already, like, the third name she was trying out. Spanish names seemed like dresses to her which she would try out, looking for the one that suits her new role, her new identity. In that part, she would take the dialogues from the language manual and try them out on the street, because it's the only tool she has. What happens when one can only speak in sentences from the language manual? How far can you get with this? How do you help yourself when the language doesn't help you at all? In the first part, we thought about these kind of questions.

Before Xiaobin renames herself for the second time, before she tries out to be "Sabrina," there's an ellipsis. Suddenly, there's already an intimacy established with Vijay and his time in Argentina is over, he's about to go back to India. In that part, Xiaobin's speech is more fluent. It's also in that part that we invented different opportunities for Xiaobin to talk in Chinese. After being humiliated as someone who struggles to express herself, she gains the dignity and calm

of someone who can unite identity and language. Of course, she had never lost her ability to talk in her mother language, but it takes her some time until she finds the opportunities to integrate it into her new everyday life and to complete her new identity as someone who is living in two everyday languages. In that second part, scenes are longer, have more development and more shots. And it's only in the end of the film, in the futures, where we would use continuity editing as a support for the fictionalization.





Nele Wohlatz

Born 1982 in Hannover, Germany. She studied scenography at the University of Applied Arts Karlsruhe and film at the University Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires. In 2016 she was selected for the Berlinale Talents Docstation. She directed several short films and videos for theatre productions. She teaches documentary film and curates a program of German cinema at Goethe Institut Buenos Aires. In 2013, her first feature film *Ricardo Bär* was premiered at BAFICI and received awards at FIDMarseille, Antofadocs and Duisburger Filmwoche.

Murillo Cine

Murillo Cine is a Buenos Aires based production company founded by Georgina Baisch and Cecilia Salim in 2013. Murillo produces feature films and documentaries that portray reality from an innovative point of view. The company enables passionate and committed film authors to fulfill their ambitions. Their first feature film "Hijos nuestros" directed by Juan Fernández Guebauer and Nicolas Suarez premiered at 30th Mar del Plata International Film Festival - Argentine Competition (Awards for best

Films

El futuro perfecto

(Feature film, Argentina 2016)

Tres oraciones sobre la Argentina

(Short for the collective project Archivos Intervenidos: Cine Escuela, Argentina 2016)

La mochila perfecta

(Short, Argentina/Germany 2014)

Ricardo Bär

(Feature film, Argentina 2013, co-directed by G. Naumann)

Schneeränder

(Short, Germany 2009)

Novios del Campo

(Short, Argentina 2009, co-directed by G. Naumann)

feature film (FEISAL) and best editing (SAE). Winner of INCAA First Feature Film contest and Guadalajara Construye 2015- "El futuro perfecto" by Nele Wohlatz will have its world premiere at Cineasti del presente, 69th Festival del Film Locarno. The film was supported by INCAA and Mecenzago Cultural and invited to development workshops at Berlinale Talents Docstation (2016) and DocMontevideo (2015) and won the Buenos Aires Lab (BAL, BAFICI 2016). Murillo Cine is currently developing the



feature film projects "Mancha" by Lucía Ursi and "La botera" by Sabrina Blanco (Raymundo Gleyzer Fund INCAA, Ibermedia screenwriting scholarship 2015, Nuevas Miradas EICTV). In co-production with Rizoma, Murillo Cine is producing Agustín Toscano's "El motoarreatador" (Awarded at Bolivia Lab 2015, FNA-EICTV scholarship, Ventana Andina development award, Ibermedia screenwriting scholarship 2016, VFF Talents highlight pitch award at Talents Project Market).

Production Company

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Trailer

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 el futuro perfecto

