

LABOUR POWER PLANT

a film by Robert Schlicht and Romana Schmalisch

BENVENUE
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 69^e Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Forum Expanded

SPECTRE in collaboration with VOLTE SLAGEN and WELTFILM
Producer OLIVIER MARBOEUF Coproducers MICHEL BALAGUÉ, KRISTINA KONRAD, ROBERT SCHLICHT, ROMANA SCHMALISCH
Director of photography ROMAIN LE BONNIEC Montage EYTAN IPEKER Sound design GÁBOR RIPLI Sound TÉRENCE MEUNIER
Mixing MIKAËL BARRE Assistant director FRIEDERIKE BÉRAT Production manager JEREMY ROSSI Music GUSTAV

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LABOUR POWER PLANT

**A film by
Romana Schmalisch
& Robert Schlicht**

**Fiction, running time: 85 min, color,
screen ratio: 2.39, 2019
Language: French, Subtitles: English**

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PRODUCTIONS

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<https://www.facebook.com/Labourpowerplant2019>

**World Premiere
at Berlinale 2019
Forum Expanded**

SCREENINGS

11 feb 2019 - 21:30

at Arsenal 1

12 feb 2019 - 14:00

at Werkstattkino@silent green

13 feb 2019 - 20:45

at CinemaxX 6

SYNOPSIS

long synopsis:

A new production centre, maybe set in an undetermined future. What is being produced here? We shall find out by following the given traces. Two pairs of hands trying to untangle themselves. A human sheep virtually cut into pieces. A warm welcome to the authors and actors of their lives. Stories being told, their narrators dissected. When the gates open, those leaving Labour Power Plant have been made fit for the demands of the labour market. The next production cycle begins ... People with their own wills, interests and desires are being equipped with the different physiological, cognitive, psychological and social core competencies to transform them into human resources. Meanwhile, the management is introducing new methods to enrich the products with the innovative features of "self-evaluation", "self-optimization", and, most importantly, "self-fulfillment". A series of interventions are performed, leading to an assembly that may appear strange at first sight.

short synopsis:

A new production centre, set in an undetermined future. What is being produced here? People with their own wills, interests and desires are being equipped with the different physiological, cognitive, psychological and social core competencies to transform them into human resources. Welcome to Labour Power Plant.





INTERVIEW

Robert Schlicht & Romana Schmalisch

by Olivier Marboeuf / Spectre Productions

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February 2019

What is Labour Power Plant?

This fictional institution is the answer to a thought experiment: Let's assume that the everyday, all-pervasive, 'natural', and therefore invisible micro-politics present in our society do not exist. Then you need to outsource the production of willing workers, the human capital on which society depends, into a dedicated 'labour power plant'. This is a fiction, however the processes employed, and most of the situations shown in the film, are actually reenactments of real training courses we have been observing – in employment and job centres, schools, psychological and counselling services etc., that teach people the general capacities required on today's labour market, the so-called 'soft skills'.

Labour Power Plant is a fiction film, but the project started with a thorough documentary research. Could you say a few words about the transition from this initial investigation to the final form of this film?

It began with a two-year residency at the cultural space Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers in the banlieue of Paris. During our research we did not want to be only observers, but tried to involve the people, discussing, improvising and creating small scenes together outside the frame of the institutions. Throughout the process we were always interested in the tension between documentary and fiction, and how we could put it to use. To cite Brecht: 'A photograph of the Krupp works tells us next to nothing about these institution. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. So something must in fact be built up, something artificial, staged.' By combining a documentary mode of representation with a fictional form that is developed out of real situations we wanted to create an image of reality whose mere depiction may not readily give away its meaning for our society.

Why was it important to you to not only work with professional actors, but also with people from the field?

Already in the workshops that we organised with trainers and trainees, as well as with professional and amateur actors, it was interesting to see how well the 'non-actors' knew, and reflected upon, their roles. Some of the trainers and trainees play themselves in the film. Introducing actors into these situations, on the other hand, was for us a means of shifting the script, thus showing that indeed there is a script to be followed.

Language plays an important part in your film: people hardly ever stop talking ...

In part, this stems from the fact that we are showing situations of learning: here, movements, practices and behaviours are not yet fluid or well-rehearsed, and hence need to be verbalised in explanations, analyses or advice. In this way, learning always implies a dysfunctionality, or better: something that is not-yet-functional, which allows to show a functionality within the social life that is normally invisible exactly due to the fact that it works flawlessly and smoothly. Another aspect related to language is how constant self-reflection and self-analysis has become an inevitable capacity of anyone offering themselves on the labour market. Instead of simply following orders you are expected to act self-dependently, you have to have internalised the management of yourself. Language thus becomes an instrument of power by framing the discourse about one's own subjectivity.

We see numerous characters in the film, but we never really go into the details of their psychology, it rather works like a choir. All the trainees are only one body of material to be digested by the Labour Power Plant, the institution that is perhaps the main character of the film ...

Psychology is overrated. When we asked one of the trainers to describe the people he typically encounters, he replied by referring to the seven dwarves: one is always grumpy, one always sleepy, one happy, one dopey and so on ... We are more interested in the structure, the framework that everybody is part of and in which everyone has to act. Comically, one of the catchphrases of today's self-management is to "think outside the box". But of course, even the outside of this box is still inside the same logics of putting your labour power to use in the service of those who paid for it.

You also introduce the idea of the theatre as a form of management of the future. Is this a way of placing the art and culture sector at the forefront of an affective economy?

First of all, this is again a strategy that is gleaned from real life: the “théâtre d’entreprise” (corporation theatre) – specialised theatre companies hired by the management that intervene in the work processes in a theatrical form in order to reveal certain problems or glitches, attempting to invoke a moment of catharsis by involving the participants at once as spectators and as actors. (This is actually a cruel appropriation of Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed.) While this theatrical form appears in the film as a means of the management of Labour Power Plant, the film itself tries to counter it with a kind of inverted ‘Verfremdungseffekt’, ie., an alienation not from a fictional narration, but an alienation from the depicted reality, to better understand it, and to question a seeming ‘naturalness’ of social relations, which are indeed fabricated and involve power relations.

Like the building, the camera itself seems to be a character that circulates, navigates from one body to another, neither objective nor completely subjective ...

Together with our DOP, Romain Le Bonniec, we tried to find for each course specific movements or dispositives of the camera. In this way, the camera appears as an agent of the institution; we don’t identify with the trainees nor the trainers, or even the management, but with this system of Labour Power Plant. It’s a way of trying to adapt to the enemy, because as Sun Tzu (another hero of management theory) said: “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.” One of these battles consists in pointing out the fact that being able to be a wage worker is not a natural feature of human beings but a quality that has been produced by, and serves, a certain social system.

BIO

Romana Schmalisch studied fine arts at the Berlin University of the Arts. She was an artist-in-residence at many institutions including the Jan Van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, Studio Voltaire in London and Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. **Robert Schlicht** studied philosophy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Together, they work at the interface of art, film and theory to grapple with how historical processes and societal structures can be reproduced in film. The themes of labour in capitalist societies are a focal point in their exhibitions, performance series and films. Their works include the screen-ing and performance series *The Choreography of Labour* at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers (2013–2014), the play *All the best from Labour Power Plant* at La Commune – Centre dramatique national, Aubervilliers (2017), as well as the exhibitions *Titre de travail* at FRAC Grand Large–Hauts-de-France, Dunkerque (2018) and *Humanity at Work* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2018 /2019). They realised the short film *Top / Down* in 2017. *Labour Power Plant* is their first feature film.

CREDITS

Main Cast:

Trainees:

Aisha – Farida Gillot
Martine – Émmanuelle Péron
Rose – Aude Ollier
Louis – Franc Bruneau
Florence – Clara Gensburger
Solange – Delphine Léonard
Albert – Samir Zanoun
Gilles – Jacques Ledran
Thomas – Frédéric Schulz-Richard

Trainers:

Cécilia Alvez de Oliveira, Frédéric Djebri, Dominique Deleseleuc,
Maryvonne Breuil, Jean-Marc Piquemal, Robert Rizo, Hélène Milan

Managers:

Monsieur Chevalier – Xavier Brossard
Monsieur Legrand – Arnaud Bichon
Constance Condillac – Cécile Lancia

Written and directed by: Robert Schlicht/Romana Schmalisch

Director of photography: Romain Le Bonniec

1st assistant director: Friederike Bérat

Sound operators: Tércence Meunier, Frédéric Dabo

Line producer: Jeremy Rossi

Editing: Eytan Ipeker, Robert Schlicht/Romana Schmalisch

Mix: Mikael Barre

Sound design: Gábor Rippli

Additional sounds: João Polido

Animation: Philippe Cuxac

Post Production studio: VOLTE SLAGEN

Producer: Olivier Marboeuf

Co Producers: Michel Balagué, Kristina Konrad, Robert
Schlicht/Romana Schmalisch

Associate producer: Cédric Walter, Koen Claerhout

Produced by: Spectre Productions

Co Produced by: VOLTE SLAGEN & Weltfilm

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FILM CAREER

Festivals

02/2019: Berlinale, Forum Expanded, Berlin, Germany (world premiere)