

PERSONALE



un film di Carmen Trocker
con Aleksandra Lazic Jovanovic, Alexandra Sangeozan, Amelia Colonna, Augustine Mahan Douan, Camelia Ungureanu, Dijana Renko, Francesco Altomonte, Founেকে Dabo, Halima Sadeq, Ibrahim Tounkara, Julia Prugger, Klodiana Dedej, Lassina Kone, Maria Cristina Ciocan, Marisa Moro, Maya Petrova, Meldena Ese, Natalia Lisovska, Olena Mokilak, Olena Rofeyenko, Ousmane Diarra, Raimonda Kacbufi, Rodica Merlici, Ruth Siehi Monsekela, Simona Cogotti, Sonja Planinschek, Vukica Bumbesevic, Zuzana Prekopova

Bagarrefilm in coproduzione con Mischief Films in collaborazione con Albolina Film con il sostegno di IDM Commission Südtirol, Bundesministerium für Kunst und Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport Österreich, Autonome Provinz Bozen – Abteilung deutsche Kultur - Amt für Film und Medien, Provincia Autonoma Bolzano – Cultura Italiana - Centro Audiovisivi presenta un film scritto e diretto da Carmen Trocker prodotto da Carmen Trocker Ronny Trocker coprodotto Ralph Wieser fotografia Małgorzata Szyłak suono Nora Czamlar (FTA) montaggio Federico Neri (BFS) postproduzione Cine Chromatix Italy studio suono e mixaggio Menura Film montaggio del suono Nora Czamlar (FTA) foley artist e fonico di mix Manuel Meichsner (FTA)

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film delights

In a lively hotel business in the Italian Dolomites, PERSONALE pays close attention where looking away is all part of the system. We observe workers going about their daily tasks: folding towels, making beds and mopping floors and bathrooms. But the pressure is great, time is short and working conditions are precarious.





Synopsis

The washing machines are spinning, people are cleaning, folding towels, vacuuming and mopping floors. Contrary to our own experiences as guests in a hotel, we take a look behind the scenes and see what they are trying hard to hide: we observe the housekeeping team at their tiring daily work in a 4-star hotel in the Italian Dolomites. The women and few men on the staff, all with a history of migration, wear white aprons and blue gloves and ensure constant cleanliness. We follow their routine movements in the corridors, hotel rooms and the hotel laundry room. A completely new perspective opens up, determined by the cyclical repetition of the same activities: folding towels, making beds and mopping floors and bathrooms. The overriding maxim is to keep the tourist machinery running despite all internal and external resistance.

There is talk of shifts that are far too long, hardly any sleep and no opportunities for vacation or sick leave. What the workers share are the brief breaks at the coffee machine or stories from their personal lives that intertwine with their daily routines. Moments of connection emerge, illuminating the hectic nature of their everyday lives.

“Personale” radically and exclusively takes the perspective of the workers. Of the hotel guests, who usually only stay temporarily, we only discover traces, as the cleaning staff regularly finds them: dirty dishes, empty coffee cups, forgotten earrings or scraps of paper. The film takes a close look at this seemingly immaculate microcosm, tells us about the living realities of the workers, and makes visible what is meant to remain invisible.

How would you describe the background to your film or how can the basic idea of the film be briefly summarized?

I grew up in a village that became rich from tourism. It is designed almost exclusively for tourism and the marketing of the landscape. Public social places are increasingly disappearing and are being absorbed into the rhythms and needs of the streams of visitors. At the same time, guests are wooed with the promise of an authentic and traditional culture. A construct in which the fact that this industry rests on the shoulders of migrant workers is disruptive and must be suppressed. Talking about it is like a taboo. The concept of the film is very simple: to leave the stage to the workers and look at the system from their perspective alone. We want to make visible what is supposed to remain invisible.

And in the case of the film, this stage is the 4-star hotel in the Dolomite mountains. You shoot your movie exclusively in this hotel. What does this hotel stand for to you and how would you describe the hotel business?

The hotel is a symbol and figure-head of the tourism industry. It is rich in promises on the outside and functio-

nality on the inside and contains a lot of visual and associative imagery: claustrophobic hotel corridors and hallways, sparkling clean, mirror-image surfaces, automated, constantly repetitive hand movements, almost continuously running washing machines for vast quantities of white, spotless laundry that is reproduced and presented every day. In between, the laundry with its sound of machine noise and voices and the corridors of the hotel, where the workers inside are supposed to move as invisibly and inconspicuously as possible.

Telling the story of the hotel as a business and juxtaposing the stories of the workers with this very place shows the interdependencies as if under a magnifying glass. Two types of travelers meet in this place. On the one hand, the tourists, who travel in search of relaxation and distraction from everyday life, and on the other, the nomadic workers, who set off out of necessity in the hope of a better life for themselves and their families. Some take up space at the front, while others crowd around the back. There is a clear hierarchy in the hotel. The paying guest is the yardstick of the system, to which everything else is subordinated. The work is geared towards their wishes and complaints.

Looking at the system from the reverse and focusing on a very limited space makes it possible to visualize people and structures that fit into a larger context of migrant work.

Your film focuses on the workers. How difficult was it to gain their trust and find a hotel as a filming location in the first place?

During my research, I realized that this industry is a very fearful space. Be it on the part of some hotel operators, who were suspicious of me and the project, as well as from the workers, who were unsure about how much they were allowed to say. We were lucky enough to win over the governess of a housekeeping team to our approach. She recognized that we were interested in the people and wanted to show the work they do on a daily basis. The same applied to the hotel operator, who trusted that we would show how well his team works. As a result, he was no longer interested in our work and we were able to move around the hotel as if we were part of the staff. It was important that our presence was open and transparent and that it was clear that we were moving around with the knowledge and approval of the management.

In preparation, I was at the hotel on and off for over a year, spending the days with the women and men. We had continuous conversations, individually or in groups, and explained and described how we wanted to tell their reality.

The housekeeping team is at the lowest level of the hotel hierarchy. The fact that we wanted to give space exclusively to their work in our film gradually aroused their interest and also made them proud in a way. They allowed us to participate in their day-to-day work in an increasingly trusting and natural way and generously gave us moments of their reality. You could also say that we gradually became accomplices.

The workers portrayed are all migrants. Could you tell us more about them? Where are they from, how did they end up in this hotel?

The workers come from Eastern Europe, West Africa and southern Italy. It's a migration from war and economic hardship. Many have left their children and spouses behind and, with their work, enable them to live in their countries of origin, finance their children's studies and education with their work or become fathers or grandmothers in their absence.

The desire to catch up with the family and settle down to life in their place of work is great. The possibilities of finding a place to live are almost impossible. They do their work very professionally and with pride. The big problem is that they are denied the opportunity to lead a life outside of work and are forced to live a life of "absent presence", as migration researcher Abdelmalek Sayad calls it. They are absent in the country of work, even though they are present, and they are present in the country of origin, even though they are absent.

How did the actual collaboration with the workers on site work? Or how difficult was it to coordinate the filming with the intensive working hours of the company?

The housekeeping team's work is precisely timed. Apart from the half-hour lunch break, there is hardly a quiet moment in the eight-hour shift. As a team—we were three women—we had to somehow find our way into this cycle every day. We integrated ourselves into this body of work and people as carefully as possible so as not to get in the way or disrupt processes and to adapt to the moods in the team. Time was a very important factor in slowly gaining the trust

of our protagonists, exchanging private things with them, giving them space to talk about things they didn't agree with, making it clear to them that they could signal at any time that they didn't want to be filmed. And at some point, they simply got used to us. We became part of the swarm that moves through the inner corridors of the hotel every day.

How would you describe the cinematic concept of your film and what were the biggest challenges in its realization? It can be assumed that filming in the sometimes confined spaces was not at all easy. How did you approach the situation?

We developed a concept to realize this reality on film. On the one hand, we decided to only tell the story of the workplace and only from the perspective of the migrant workers. On the other hand, we developed a cinematic language that works purely observationally, but in which we also clearly direct and shape the gaze. We thought in terms of cycles, choreographies and rhythms. And it was important to us to get close to the people, their faces, their gestures and actions with the camera. Similar to poetry, which opens up wide spaces with just a few words, we looked for details and

fragments in which something of the human dimension and the structural nature of these lives becomes visible.

In addition to developing a clear visual style, we defined places through which we could structure our narrative. It was an advantage that the space in which we moved was limited. This allowed us to react quickly and change plans if necessary. The fact that the film could be made in this form is also thanks to the great work of camerawoman Malgorzata Szyrak. She handled the situations with great patience, concentration and empathy. The same applies to the great work of sound recordist Nora Czamlar, who had to develop daily strategies to cope with the incredible noise level of the washing machines and dryers in order to capture the voices and conversations of the protagonists. In the edit, we took a fresh and intensive look at the material that we had collected over six weeks of filming. The dramatic flair and sensitivity of editor Federico Neri made it possible to further develop our approach and to translate the different levels into a cinematic narrative.

Interview: Doris Bauer



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Carmen Trocker was born and grew up in South Tyrol. She studied at the German Film and Television Academy (dffb) in Berlin. She has worked as an editor and in the organisation of several art exhibitions between Berlin and Italy. For several years she curated the documentary film programme of the children's short film festival KUKI in Berlin. She lives and works in Berlin.

Filmographie

The House (I/2016)

Hanna day in/day out (I/2004)

Up there where the devil lives (D/I 1999)



What does that tell us about ourselves, about the things we don't want to see or we no longer want to know?

During my research, I met the workers regularly. My frequent visits to the hotel were important to build mutual trust. Initial doubts and mistrust dwindled the more often I came and spent whole days with them. They were surprised that it was their story I wanted to tell.

My grandparents were among the pioneers of tourism in the village. In the first half of the last century, they ran a guest house on the village square. My grandmother sold it before I was born and my parents later entered the booming tourist business with a sports shop in the same place.

In my encounters with the workers, I often thought that I could be in their place if this landscape, where I was born, had not profited so excessively from the tourist business. This feeling gives rise to a solidarity and closeness with the workers that I often lack in comparison to the villagers among whom I grew up, who had quickly become rich.

During my regular visits to the village, something had changed almost every time, usually something new had been built and something old had

disappeared. It is almost exclusively designed for tourism and for even better earning opportunities. One could make the exaggerated claim that the village abolishes itself through tourism and becomes a mere scenery for its own staging.

Hardly anyone wants to know that this scenery rests on the shoulders of the migrant workers. Why is it not talked about? Does it not fit in with a strategy that wants to sell guests an 'original, intact culture and landscape'? Are people so quick to forget where they come from and what has made them who they are? Does the presence of migrant workers disrupt the narrative of their own success story?

Taking the perspective of migrant workers and looking from the inside of a tourist institution to the other side of this industry shifts the focus and how it is understood. With PERSONALE, we give the workers the stage and take them out of their invisibility. They grant us access to their everyday working reality and overwrite the promise of a carefree vacation from the hotel brochures with their daily routines, challenges and exhaustion.

What does that tell us about ourselves, about the things we don't want to see or we no longer want to know?

Italy is dependent on migrant labour in many areas, but at the same time racist and anti-migration tendencies are booming. In this climate, it seems very important to me to broaden our view, to create spaces for observation and to sharpen our perceptions of what motivates people and for the things they achieve with their work.



Mischief Films

Mischief Films is a Vienna-based independent production company, founded by producer Ralph Wieser and award-winning director Georg Misch in 2002. It is our mission to tackle socially significant stories and carefully turn them into memorable documentaries.

Focusing on collaborations with innovative auteurs, we also encourage directors to develop their own distinctive style and support their creative approaches from unique angles. Ambitious to reach a wide and heterogeneous audience, our films are screened around the world – whether on TV, in cinemas or on renowned festivals.

Many of our films are international co-productions with Arte, ORF, WDR, SWR, BBC and Channel 4 as well as the US-American film fund ITVS. Our films have won prestigious awards such as the Vienna Film Award, Hot Docs Toronto, Visions du Réel Nyon, Cinéma du Réel Paris.

Mischief Films is member of the Austrian Documentary Association dok.at, Documentary Association of Europe DAE and the Austrian Producers Alliance Die Produzent*innen. Ralph Wieser is member of the European Film Academy and the Austrian Film Academy.

mischief-films.com

Bagarrefilm

Bagarrefilm was founded in 2010 by the siblings Carmen and Ronny Trocker.

We develop and realize independent, ambitious and original fiction and documentary films. Our curiosity about the world is the motor and film is the medium for our stories. The feature film *The Human Factor* (2021), co-produced by Bagarrefilm and directed by Ronny Trocker, had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and in the Berlinale's Panorama section.



Production details

PERSONALE

IT/AT 2024, 93min

Original Language: Italian, Russian, French, Romanian, Bambara

Technical data

Shooting format	Digital
Mastering	2K
Master/final format	DCP
Sound	Dolby 5.1
Aspect Ratio	1,66:1
Subtitles	English, German, Italian

Credits

Written and Directed by	Carmen Trocker
Cinematography	Małgorzata Szyłak
Sound/Sounddesign	Nora Czamlar (FTA)
Editing	Federico Neri (BFS)
Postproduction	Cine Chromatix Italy
Colorgrading	Inga Sagrodnik
Soundpostproduction	Menura Film
Foley Artist und Mix	Manuel Meichsner (FTA)
Producers	Carmen Trocker, Ronny Trocker, Ralph Wieser

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