

Burning Out

A film by Jérôme le Maire

inspired by the book « GLOBAL BURN-OUT » by PASCAL CHABOT
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World premiere @ IDFA 2016
Competition for Feature-Length Documentary

www.burning-out-film.com

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SYNOPSIS

All over Europe burnout has reached epidemic proportions among employees in the public and private sectors. Will we end up killing ourselves? Or will we be able to find meaning and joy at work?

Burning Out is literally a drama about life and death. For two years, the Belgian director Jérôme le Maire followed the members of a surgical unit in one of the biggest hospitals in Paris. Constantly under severe stress, understaffed and subject to severe budget cuts, employees fight each other for resources. Meanwhile the management imposes ever more stringent efficiency and profitability targets.



CREDITS

Director: JEROME LE MAIRE
Photography: JEROME LE MAIRE
Sound: JÉRÔME LE MAIRE, MARIANNE ROUSSY, ROMAIN CADILHAC
Editing: MATYAS VERESS
Sound editing: JEAN-LUC FICHEFET
Mix: DENIS SÉCHAUD
Producers: ARNAULD DE BATTICE & ISABELLE TRUC
Co-producers: FÉLICIE ROBLIN & ELISA GARBAR

TECHNICAL INFO

LENGTH: 85' & 52'
FORMAT: DCP, HD, Blu-ray, DVD
SOUND: 5.1 & stereo
LANGUAGE: French
SUBTITLES: English
PRODUCTION YEAR: 2016

PRODUCTION

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A film produced by AT Doc, Zadig Productions and Louise Productions

In co-production with RTBF (Belgian TV), ARTE France, RTS Radio Television from Switzerland, SRG SSR, Magellan Films.

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THE DIRECTOR

Jérôme le Maire

Director's Statement

“All my films came from my passion for humans. Burning Out is the gripping story of a global epidemic: the sadly famous burn-out.

Three years ago I attended a conference about burn-out syndrome at the prestigious Saint-Louis hospital in Paris. I was shocked when I realized that the conference was not to help the patients but to help the doctors, to help the doctors themselves. I felt the conference was like an SOS. I introduced myself to a doctor, I told her I wanted to make a film about burn-out. Luckily she saw me as someone who could help them. She was my ‘access’ to the hospital. She would become one of my protagonists. The one who wants to put out the fire from the inside.



After each screening of the film I meet people who tell me that this is exactly what is going on in their company and that they recognize it all from their own lives. Unfortunately it seems like this situation at the French hospital is more the rule rather than the exception. Our modern world has transformed hospitals into health factories and patients into objects.

‘Efficiency, productivity, performance’ has become the mantra everywhere for managers. For decades we have known what happens if we expose animals to stress: they will eventually eat each other. But what happens when we expose people to great stress?”

Biography

After studying journalism at the University of Brussels and then filmmaking at IAD in Belgium, Jerome directed several short fiction films after graduating in 1995.

In 2003 he made a feature length documentary «**VOLTER NE M’INTÉRESSE PAS**».

In 2006, while living in a small palm grove in Morocco, he directed «**WHERE IS LOVE IN THE PALM GROVE?**». This feature documentary was selected for screening at a number of international film festivals, including Vision du Réel (Nyon, Switzerland), RIDM (Canada), Parnü Film Festival (Estonia) and Festival des quatre écrans (France). This film was also nominated for the European Films Awards.

In 2012, Jerome directed «**TEA OR ELECTRICITY**», a feature documentary that won about thirty awards, including the Magritte for best documentary (Belgium), Best Film Award and Public Award at the Fidadoc (Agadir, Morocco), Prix du meilleur documentaire de la Scam, Special Jury Award at the Primed Festival, Golden FIFOG at the Intl Oriental Film Festival of Geneva (Switzerland), Best Film Award at DOKUFEST (Kosovo) and Best Film

on Indigenous People at Parnü Film Festival (Estonia). This film was also nominated for the European Films Awards in the category of best documentary.

In 2013, Jerome directed a feature narrative film « **THE BIG TRIP** ». This film won the award for Best Film at the famous « Festival du film Grolandais » (France), and was selected for screening at several international film festivals: International Film Festival of Rotterdam (Holland), International Film Festival of Cannes (section ACID), International Film Festival of Belfort (France) and many others film festivals in France. This film was released in Belgium and France.

Filmography

1994 – Best Wishes – 8' fiction

1995 – Greetings – 12' fiction

2001 – Belgian Summer – 8 x 26' docu-soap

2002 – Under the Mask – 52' documentary

2003 – One Day One Life – 63' documentary feature

2007 – Where is Love in the Palm Grove? – 52' & 85' feature documentary

2012 – Tea or Electricity – 93' documentary feature

2013 – The Big Trip – 105' fiction feature

DIRECTOR JÉRÔME LE MAIRE ABOUT THE FILM

The subject of the film

Our society has a colossal problem: intense labour creates illness among workers. And it is becoming a common trend. Nowadays hard labour induced suffering doesn't only affect farmers or working class people, it also affects executives, administrators, directors, teachers, doctors etc.

This project started with a book: "Global Burnout" by Pascal Chabot (© Presses Universitaires de France). It's core idea: burnout is the pathology of civilization. A disorder mirroring our society. I took my time to dive deep into the burnout issue. I disregarded no lead. I met many people. Yet, some encounters were to be decisive.

Meeting Marie-Christine Beck was crucial. An anaesthesiologist, she contacted Pascal to invite him to come and talk about his book at her department at the Saint Louis hospital in Paris. Afterwards I met with Marie Christine again, this time at her workplace.

And after spending a few months in the surgical unit, I made the decision to shoot the entire film at the Saint Louis Hospital. The micro-society of the surgical unit with its complexity, its class system and its extremely elaborated work organization is a perfect metaphor for larger society and for the issue I desired to examine.

The shooting

From the beginning I imagined a direct cinema style film. I wanted neither interviews nor sophisticated staging. I saw the over-the-shoulder, moving, active camera, always close to the characters. It is a film about humans being dehumanized by the system. I would like to feel it on screen.

It was also a swift decision to make this film alone. For very practical financial reasons on one hand, as I planned to shoot at least three days a week for a year approximately. Another reason was to take as little space as possible in a complicated location (operating room). And last but not least, to keep the relationships that I'd developed and that I continued to maintain with various characters of the film as intimate as possible.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The hospital: APHP (Assistance Publique Hôpitaux de Paris – Public Assistance Paris Hospitals)

Saint-Louis hospital is part of AHPH. The APHP is managed as a single unit with headquarters and 39 hospitals in Ile de France. The headquarters, functioning as a holding company, is also in charge of strategic decisions, as well as financial and operational planning (including human resources). APHP currently employs 20,000 doctors and approximately 100,000 workers.

The context: hospital merger

The development of hospital groups adopted by the board of directors consists of organizing common governance between hospitals situated in one geographical area. This configuration was supposed to allow for better administration of the established institutions. Although a hospital merger is theoretically endurable, on a practical level the merger is extremely complicated to manage and to adjust to. Nowadays it is still subject to much debate.

The evolution: the T2A (fee for service basis)

The service-based fee, introduced in 2008, is the new system of French health care financing. Prior to this, public institutions received a general operating grant. At present, the grant depends on the amount of medical procedures performed per year. With the service-based fee, the revenues from hospital activities determine the expenses and not the reverse.

The other side of this system is the fact that cost-effectiveness has become the ultimate target, pushing towards enhanced productivity. If taken to the extreme, this reasoning could jeopardize the wellbeing of medical and paramedical personnel as well as patients.

Systemic approach

A systemic approach is a holistic one, treating the system as an entity. Relationships between units are more important than their individuality: the important part is the dynamic of the system, its evolution and causal and feedback links between the different parties. The systemic approach, used in psychology, is particularly appropriate for the study of psychosocial risks as only an overview can do justice to the multiple connections and interactions. Everything is related, to the extent that the observer can influence the observed.

THE PROTAGONISTS

Marie-Christine Becq

Marie Christine is somehow responsible for the making of the film at the Saint-Louis Hospital. She was the person who chose “Global Burn-Out” at a bookstore after an exhausting on-call day, read it straight through and got it into her head to invite the book’s author, Pascal Chabot, to come and talk about it at her department. Let us tell you that negotiating with one’s hierarchy to invite a person to speak about a subject like that already demonstrates a certain stance and ambition. But it did not stop there: when Marie-Christine saw me with Pascal with my desire to make this film on burnout, she once again opened the doors of her working environment in a very clever and determined way and guided me through the mysteries of the hospital until I was able to find my own way.



According to the new terminology of work-related suffering, Marie-Christine is a typical “toxic handler”. A “toxic handler” is a person possessing specific qualities that become visible during a company crisis while they are helping others in their suffering. They save companies through their acts of compassion but pay a high price for it.

It can be said out of hand that Marie-Christine has what it takes to be our protagonist. She continuously acknowledges her desire “to make things change”. As a surgery unit worker she is indeed aware that the period is one of deep trouble, however being an anaesthesiologist she knows for a fact that she is part of a profession that is particularly touched by socio-professional risks.

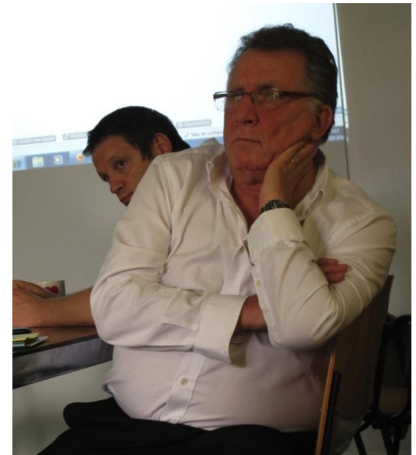
Anaesthesiologists suffer from a lack of credit and gratification, including lack of acknowledgement from their colleagues (surgeons are particularly hateful towards them as the lack of anaesthesiologists impacts the number of available operating rooms) or from their patients (who consider their medical act as minor compared to the intervention of the surgeon who will treat or cure them). Furthermore, the meaning of the anaesthesiologist’s work is lost in the new work system, where they don’t regularly examine patients they anesthetize anymore nor do they follow patient’s progress any longer. Finally, anaesthesiologists, as well as the other doctors, are faced with an ethical dilemma, as they are persistently compelled to follow the rhythm of the cash register while having the duty to heal. Add to all of this a dash of workforce shortage and some organizational chart problems and you have the perfect recipe for a PSR (psycho-social risk).

Therefore, not to act at all is out of the question for Marie-Christine. She is part of all the committees, councils and cells. She runs around, fighting, ranting, criticizing and reporting. She surprises, galvanizes, amuses, annoys and disturbs. She does indeed risk emerging less than unscathed. But does she have a choice? Because it seems that she can’t help herself.

She is just discovering the “toxic handler” calling and is more surprised than anyone else. By the way, she is the first to be taken aback by the effects of her character on the system.

Professor Sarfati

Emile Sarfati is head of general and digestive surgery at Saint Louis Hospital. The digestive surgeons here are very colourful people. They are the tough guys of the unit. It is a very stressful surgery. This specialty’s practitioners work only in the surgical unit (apart from research). Emile Sarfati is the symbol for this department. He has been in the department at Saint Louis for thirty years. He is practically synonymous with the hospital.



He was there at the time not all that long ago when each department managed its own surgical rooms, with its own equipment, its nurses and specialized anaesthesiologists. Nowadays the situation has changed drastically. Operating rooms are not dedicated to a specialty, the nurses and anaesthesiologists are multi-taskers now and are appointed equally to one or the other operating unit. Dr. Sarfati is deeply concerned by this situation. In fact, to him, nothing beats the feeling of being part of a family. A cohesive group and team spirit are fundamental parameters of work organization as he sees it. He experienced “on-the-job training” and companionship and as a university professor he regrets the disappearance of this practice through the “industrialization” of the hospital. Moreover, he is deeply saddened by the change in young surgeons’ mentalities, who nowadays choose their specialty according to the range of liberty (the most chosen fields are dermatology, ophthalmology or plastic surgery, where interventions can be scheduled) and the salaries those specialties offer.

AMBASSADORS FOR THE FILM

The writer and philosopher Pascal Chabot
Dr. Mesters, director of the European Burnout Institute or EIIRBO
(<http://burnout-institute.org>)