



Acropolis Cinema and MUBI present
the Los Angeles premiere of

THE NOTHING FACTORY

By Pedro Pinho

May 9 — 8pm
Downtown Independent

THE NOTHING FACTORY

178 min // Portugal // 2017

One night, a group of workers realizes that their administration has organized the stealing of machines from their factory. They soon understand that this is the first signal of a massive layoff. Most of them refuse to cooperate during the individual negotiations and they start to occupy their workplace. So when the administration vanishes to their great surprise, they're left with a half-empty factory... As the world around them collapses, new desires start to emerge.

The debut narrative feature by Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Pinho boldly mixes neo-realism, observational nonfiction, and even a musical number, into one of recent cinema's most memorable hybrids.

Official Selection:
Cannes (Directors' Fortnight)
TIFF (Wavelengths)
New Directors/New Films 2018



This dynamic story of labor unrest at a Portuguese factory reveals the throes of European capitalism

By Daniel Kasman

This review was originally published in MUBI's Notebook

The Nothing Factory is the film debut of Pedro Pinho, who previously made a short feature and co-directed two documentaries, one of which with Luisa Homem, who edited this new picture, as well as co-wrote it with the production collaborative Terratrema Filmes. Partially based on a Dutch play by Judith Herzberg and inspired by an idea by Jorge Silva Melo (who wrote Manuel Mozo's unjustly forgotten 1992 masterpiece, *Xavier*), the film dramatizes the dissolution of an elevator factory in Portugal, an action that sneakily comes at night when the workers discover their machines being secreted away by unknown persons.

By daylight, the company owner glad-hands the group and introduces a new head engineer and, ominously, human resources manager, who pulls employee after employee into private sessions that are revealed to be buyout conversations. The confusion, anger, palpable paranoia and personal fear of the employees inspire the first few to take the money and run, but most stick around, uniting after a few members argue to strike and reclaim the factory. The dozen or so strikers hardly remain a unified front, and arguments and distrust abound, as the cops show up, are repulsed, and the idea of self-management is floated.

Shooting in 16mm with a compositional and editing style that make the film feel like a documentary—or, in the modern parlance, feel like a hybrid film, re-staging fiction based on documentary elements—and with a set of actors who likewise successfully blur the line between reality and drama, *The Nothing Factory* plunges full hilt into the details and discourse of the particulars of the fading away of a single, lone factory and the congested

efforts by its workers to keep their labor going and their livelihood intact. Pinho then cleverly folds in a fourth-wall breaking wild card, including in his film a voiceover and the presence of a scruffy, unnamed man who seems at once an author, a thinker, or perhaps even a director (he is played by a filmmaker, Danièle Incalcaterra) researching the end of capitalism in Europe. He discovers the strike, begins hanging around the workers, and, in a few dizzyingly audacious scenes, even directs them to perform for the very movie we're watching. Thus the inhuman plight of Europe's dying capitalism, detailed and broad, is addressed, and the very way such a plight can be explained or dramatized is questioned.

The film's three-hour runtime gives *The Nothing Factory* the breadth to plunge into the nitty-gritty particulars of the workers' conversations, coalition, fights, and concerns, scripted and shot so that the drama is not classical melodrama but rather comes from the innate emotion and tension of people struggling to figure out how to make a living and, from that, live. A bit less successful is an attempt to integrate the home life (and the past generation) of one of the workers, whose wife is feeling disconnected from her preoccupied husband, into the picture, which ruptures the focus of the canvas on the workers themselves, men and women, as they come together and part around the factory. Yet the scope of the canvas is bold indeed, at once myopic in its resolute attention to these few people in this one particular and small-scale crisis, and expansive in its direct acknowledgement of this story and its participants as a by no means rare example of the pernicious, corrosive effect of capitalism's endless late stage on individual human beings.

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