

guča films

in coproduction with
CLAW films
and
Slovak Television and Radio

present:

ACTION ITEM

Slovakia, Czech republic, Germany • 2025 • 68 min.

A film by
Paula Ďurinová

Original title : *Neplatené voľno*

PRESS NOTES

Stills can be download [here](#)
Trailer [here](#)

**World premiere: Karlovy Vary (Proxima Competition) & FID Marseille
(International Competition)**



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Proxima Competition



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SYNOPSIS

In management, action items are tasks that must be performed to move forward. But what if the issue is not individual, but systemic? Set in Berlin, the film explores symptoms of a silenced condition of our time. A reflection on burnout moves from personal experience to collective perspective. Action Item is a possibility to transform anxiety into resistance, reframing struggles through shared memory, found footage, and the politics of care. What if the real task is to unlearn, pause, reimagine?

LONG SYNOPSIS

In her second feature documentary, director Paula Ďurinová explores how exhaustion is not just lived but constructed, shaped by the pressures of constant performance and control. Set in Berlin, Action Item creates a space where struggles are not only experienced but reimaged. Through collective reflection and found footage, the film traces the shift from personal fatigue to a shared understanding of systemic conditions. It challenges the narratives of self-optimization, revealing burnout as more than an individual crisis. Between resistance and care, between memory and action, Action Item uncovers what has always been there - anxiety as a public secret.





Director's Statement

In her book "Depression: A Public Feeling", one of the inspirations for my film, Ann Cvetkovich discusses how expressing emotions can have a collective and public impact. This film emerged from my personal experience with anxiety, depression, and a burnout episode several years ago. Needing to understand what had happened, I began reading various essays and self-published zines that critique the privatization of mental health and focus on its political dimensions.

The circular and repetitive aspects of depression, anxiety or burnout guide the film. Each new experience carries the memory of the previous one and, at the same time, anticipates the next. With "Action Item", I wanted to create a certain suspension of time and space in which we can reflect on past crises and depart from them to look for a wider context.

Reclaiming agency was a recurring theme in both the conversations with the protagonists and in filmmaking. Berlin now also carries experiences of unhinged police violence. I combined intimate encounters with found footage of protests and riots, depicting people supporting each other and resisting collectively—and, this way, essentially reframing the power dynamics.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR PAULA ĎURINOVÁ

Your film opens a space for reflecting on exhaustion — not only as a personal rupture, but also as something shaped by wider structures. What led you to explore burnout through cinema?

I've been carrying this project with me for quite a while. I have long-term personal experience with depression and anxiety, but a few years ago I went through something I would now describe as burnout. I was left quite shaken by this experience. As I emerged from it, I felt the need to contextualize what had happened. Alongside therapy, I started reading self-published zines, essays, and capitalism-critique theory questioning the privatization of mental health struggles. I also joined a few support groups in Berlin working with this perspective. For most of my life, I had been conditioned to think of what I experienced as a personal issue and something to manage on my own. This whole process challenged that perspective quite a bit.

I remember one particular evening when I spoke with my friend Eliana, who shared that she had also recently gone through burnout. Recognizing so many parallels in our experiences was both unsettling and strangely exciting. We were both interested in figuring out what aspects of our experiences might have a systemic source, and Eliana agreed to reflect on her experience in the film. I wanted to move beyond this personal, invisible experience, and while searching for a wider perspective, the film gradually shifts from a single protagonist to a group of people reflecting together. I'm interested in films that create a space for reflection with no necessarily strict end point. With *Action Item*, I wanted to create a pause that allows for processing.

The film opens up a collective space of speaking and listening. How did this group come together, and how did you shape the process?

My participation in several support and consciousness-raising groups in Berlin was an important inspiration. I had the idea to bring together people who didn't know each other beforehand but shared related life experiences. Eliana would, at one point in the film, enter this collective. We first filmed with a wider group, out of which a smaller one – including Jasmine, Sam, Alžběta, and Eliana – eventually formed. They all had personal experience with either depression, burnout, anxiety, or invisible chronic illness, and also prior experience with therapy, different forms of facilitation, or self-care practices. We compiled excerpts from essays and books that functioned as inspiration for collective sharing.

We worked closely with Jasmine to shape what we called a method of 'silent facilitation'. She was part of the group, while also in a quiet role guiding the discussion without imposing a sense of hierarchy. We also discussed individually what each person was open to sharing. We set a few basic principles – mainly that they shouldn't feel pressured to speak, that long silences in the group are totally okay, that we would stop filming when requested, and that we had check-in moments with a small exercise or grounding facilitated by Alžběta and Sam. The crew also shared genuine interest in the themes discussed within the group and we would share experiences and thoughts in between filming.

A narrator appears throughout the film weaving in and out of theory, memory, and presence. How did you conceptualize this voice-over?

While working in the editing room, I initially recorded a reference version of the voice-over using my own voice. That process led to conversations about what it means when the director is the one speaking, versus a protagonist or someone external. We decided to create a narrator character whose tone is distinct, yet interwoven with the voices already present in the film. Even though the narrator sometimes speaks from a more theoretical realm, it functions as a sort of ally – someone who appears occasionally, shares fragments of thought or personal insight, provides reassurance, or simply helps orient the viewer. The voice-over is built from three central texts that shaped the project as a whole. These texts were also part of the group discussions.

The visual language of the film blends intimacy, abstraction, and fragments of memory. How did this image-world evolve, and what guided your choices in working with it?

This particular visual approach grew out of a very personal moment. We paused the project when I was mourning the loss of my grandparents. I felt the need to address the grief through the medium of film, out of which my first feature, *Lapilli*, emerged. After I came back to *Action Item*, I had to find a way to reconnect with the project. I was looking at the footage and revisiting the places in Berlin that carried certain memories for me – places where I once had a panic attack and later passed by again, or elements in the city that offered focus when I felt overwhelmed.

Because the film also engages with memory and how past experiences are carried, I started to think about what it means to reclaim an image. I began literally refilming parts of our existing footage from my computer screen – reframing, cropping, and building new compositions. I was inspired by the language of archive footage and created my own interpretation of an archive – collective, shared, and fluid.

Berlin now also carries another layer of memories: the police violence towards people in solidarity with Palestine. Living in Germany, I understood that anger is not a destructive emotion but something very focused and justified. I worked with found footage of protests, riots or manifestations, depicting people fighting collectively, supporting each other, and essentially reframing the power dynamics. In the editing process with Deniz Şimşek we worked with the idea of repetition and return — how each experience echoes the last, and often anxiously awaits the next. Certain images reappear across the film, slowly shifting meaning, until something starts to take shape through rhythm rather than narrative.

How did you approach the sound design, and what role does it play within the film's structure?

While working on the first draft of the opening sequence, I already had the musical compositions of Lénok in mind. I found one specific sound in one of her tracks that obsessed me. We worked with this sound element, which changes its function throughout the film — evolving from a pressuring, antagonistic tone to something more accompanying. Lénok created a layer that supports the idea of looping and progression. On the sound design layer, we worked with Clara Becking to create a more personalized soundscape of the city.



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR PAULA ĎURINOVÁ

Paula Ďurinová (1987) is a Slovak film director and visual artist based in Berlin. Her first feature-length "Lapilli" (2024) premiered at Karlovy Vary IFF Proxima Competition and was screened in festivals such as DOK Leipzig, RIDM and Trieste. Her short films were presented at Sarajevo, Ji.hlava, CinéDOC-Tbilisi and One World Prague, among others. In Berlin she worked as Artistic director of ACUD Galerie and studied Art and Media at the Universität der Künste in the class of Thomas Arslan.

Filmography:

2024 - Lapilli, 65 min

2023 - Constant - an Homage to the Apartment, 16 min

2018 - Passing, 16 min

2016 - Interviews, 30 min



CREDITS

Written and directed by : Paula Ďurinová

Producer : Matej Sotník

Co-producers : Klára Mamojková, Wanda Kaprálová, Paula Ďurinová, Roman Genský

DOP : Paula Ďurinová, Darya Chernyak, Clara Becking, Radka Šišuláková

Editor : Deniz Şimşek, Paula Ďurinová

Script editors : Viera Čákanyová, Martin Horyna

Sound design : Clara Becking, Paula Ďurinová

Music : Lenka Adamcová

Colour Grading : Dominik Jursa

Architecture : Jan Matýsek

Production company profile

guča films is an independent production company based in Bratislava. Our films have been presented at international film festivals such as Berlinale, Karlovy Vary, Busan IFF, Sheffield Doc/Fest, DOK Leipzig, FIPADOC etc. We co-produce with established partners from Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Belgium or Canada, involving broadcasters such as ARTE or Czech TV. Our philosophy is to support creative freedom without compromises.

<https://gucafilms.com/>