

Is something amiss up the mountain?



CAPITALISM: At the heart of the capitalist world, the Swiss mountain town of Davos is a case study in equilib

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Davos

Director(s): **Daniel Hoesl** **Julia Niemann**,

Producer(s): **Georg Aschauer**, **Julia Niemann**, **Daniel Hoesl**

Country: **Austria**

There is an eerie uncanniness underlying daily routines in a sanatorium high atop the Swiss Alps in ' *Magic Mountain*. Its protagonist Hans comes to visit a relative and, his own health failing with a lurid end in sight, years. As the residents cocoon, feverish, from looming mortality, time and a sense of reality bend, and war recedes. When the book came out in 1924, the locals of the resort town were less than happy about the change. They explain to visitors in Davos. They were tired of being known as a retreat for ill people, and publicity was a bad image. The documentary by Vienna-based filmmaking duo Daniel Hoesl and Julia Niemann has its roots in the Swiss festival forced online by the world's current lung disease crisis.

A century on from Mann's novel, the town of **Davos** now has a new claim to fame. A popular ski resort, the **World Economic Forum**, a meeting place for the most influential of global leaders and business

essence of a place — those who can import an event and attract the most media fanfare through more there year-round? And is Davos really, as the WEF's organisers would have it, where the globe's good is averted, or is it still in its way an out-of-touch bubble of creeping malady, where something's not quite

A forum?

It's instructive to watch *Davos* in counterpoint to *The Forum*, Marcus Vetter's Swiss-German take on the event. Vetter opened *DOK Leipzig* in 2019, to reflect on just how different two documentaries inspired by the same event have been determined by access. The WEF sessions are invitation-only, their attendance strictly controlled by discretion, and an air of exclusivity. Vetter's was the first independent film team permitted behind the event's history, and watching his film you would think that the Forum *is* Davos. It presents as nothing more than a whirlwind bustle of flashbulbs and big names shown with such breathless, high-stakes gravity that the reversion to more peaceful moments. *The Forum* is not simply a glossy promotional vehicle for the World Economic Forum; its spoken diplomacy through civil niceties is out of date and complicit in shoring up a status quo of global inequality. It shadows founder and chairman Klaus Schwab and interviews those with a vested, participatory stake in the event. Much of the frenzy of touted significant moments as possible, its deference to Schwab's vision and a certain complacency is apparent.

who gets to define the essence of a place...?

By contrast, the exclusion (we can assume) of the Davos crew from the more closed quarters of power is a blessing. There is room to breathe and contemplate, in this film, as we are taken into spaces of the world that have no shape to the Forum. On a cattle farm, a calf is still-born. The milking is done; members of the family are seen in economic times. Asylum seekers meet at a centre. Undocumented, their welcome is insecure, at the discretion of an exclusive guest list of influencers. Tension over the presence of the Forum bristles in many quarters. A club member voices his reluctance to eat trout from the lake, given the «piss and puke» from Davos attendees. Protesters prepare outright protests. «Asshole meets shithole» sums up one sign on Trump's inclusion. At a town hall, a security budget, a long-term resident says he has come to increasingly doubt over the decades that the event is worth it for Davos, as it's made the seat of the forging of harmful, secret arrangements. A glimpse into the world of Klaus Schwab pussyfoots around a reporter's questions on Trump and delegate representation, saying that the world is not ready for climate activist Greta Thunberg has claimed the people who've flown in to attend Davos are «weird». *Life of a Refugee*, an interactive theatre simulation, subjects participants to border-crossing humiliations. They imaginatively identify with those who bear the brunt of power-broking. Will they take a new empathy or a reinforced complacency, confirming Davos's outsourcing as a resort for the corrupt and ailing of spirit?

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