

JULIAN ROSEFELDT

Penumbra

09.09 – 20.11.2021

How does the past of a far future look like? Where to mankind will be driven by the forces of neoliberalism, climate change, populism, and self exploitation by social media? The film *Penumbra* is not science fiction. Instead it shows where we stand right now in a fictitious setting which offers the framework for a paradoxical enigma: Who will we be when we are gone?

Following *In the Land of Drought*, 2015/17, the condensed version of my filmic interpretation of Joseph Hayden's oratorio *The Creation*, the new work *Penumbra* originates in a film work which I am currently producing as a visual backdrop for a performance of Robert Schumann's oratorio *Scenes from Goethe's Faust* at the opera houses of Antwerp, Ghent and Montpellier.

For his two key works of German literature, *Faust: A Tragedy, Part I and II* (1808–1832), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe created a visionary protagonist. The character of the scientist and entrepreneur Dr. Faust anticipated the big issues of our time: capitalism, post-colonialism, the exploitation of nature, and environmental disasters. Robert Schumann chose a few fragments of Goethe's masterpiece and composed music for it. For my filmic adaptation I fragmented the romantic composition and used it as a soundtrack.

Same as the 43-minute *In the Land of Drought*, *Penumbra* focusses on the „After us“, and addresses the relationship between man and his impact on the world, looking back from an imagined far future upon the post-Anthropocene – the aftermath of significant human influence on our planet. This time, mankind has seemingly left Earth for good, trying its luck on a faraway unknown hyper-urbanized desert planet. But again, apparently things did not go well at that extraterrestrial colony and only some hectically built space settlements seem to grant shelter. On the planet's surface we see abandoned megacities in a dystopian landscape and artificial circular plantations, positioned in the desert around the cities in order to nourish their last inhabitants. The camera hovers meditatively over the desolate landscape and the ruined megapolises. Connoting surveillance, the satellite's / drone's / bird's eye view removes human perspective with us onlookers kept at a distance throughout.

Taken as one long continuous shot the film begins with a computer-generated sequence in which the camera floats through the infinity of the star-studded black cosmos. Pieces of space junk pass by at high speed until a lone yellowish desert planet appears which we approach with decelerating speed. We get closer and fly across the dry planet surface, interspersed only by some artificial circular plantations, while slowing down more and more until we reach the outskirts of an abandoned megacity which seems to cover large parts of the planet, like a cancerous structure that suffocates its host until ceasing along with it.

At now even slower speed our camera traverses the endless monotonous urban landscapes, until it reaches their limits and re-enters the desert continuing behind. Back there we spot one of those agriculture circles and approximate it. There, after flying across what looks like one of the last remaining artificial forest islands, we switch back to real camera footage shot with a drone and dive into the woods where we finally arrive at a hidden techno rave at a small forest glade, crowded by drugged young party people dancing in a kind of last escapist ritual from bright daylight into the night in happy ecstasy. Our camera now observes the dancers in extreme slow motion and portrays them individually. The detailed intimate study of their trance, accompanied not by nervously pulsating techno beats but by the elegiac romantic sound of

Schumann's original music, is seductive to such an extent that after a while we feel like joining the party and dancing among them.

When writing *Faust I* and especially *Faust II* Goethe had a clairvoyant vision of our time, foreseeing the destructive power of greed, capitalism and globalisation, and celebrating an utopian vision of a better world which echoes in today's longing for esoterism and transcendence, and in the increasing consumption of synthetic drugs. Paradoxically, the extreme slow motion images of the raving ecstatic youth, clearly enjoying their state of trance, offer an optimistic and happy perspective on a dystopian world, in which – resembling the absorbent black hole of social media – the only escape from a suffocating, highly technologised society at the threshold of its own extinction, seems to be a narcissistic ritual in total oblivion.

Julian Rosefeldt

Produced by Opera Ballet Vlaanderen

Co-produced by Fondazione In Between Art Film and Sammlung Wernhörer

Parts of the computer-generated segment were produced at the Animationsinstitut of Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg

In the Land of Drought

A condensed version of Rosefeldt's filmic interpretation of Joseph Haydn's *The Creation* and conceived for the Ruhrtriennale 2015, *In the Land of Drought* (2015/2017) confronts the relationship between man and his impact on the world. Set to atmospheric sounds and a pulsating hum, the 43-minute piece looks back from an imagined future upon the post-Anthropocene: the aftermath of significant human influence on Earth. An army of scientists appear to investigate archeologically at the remnants of civilisation after humanity has made itself extinct. Shot entirely using a drone, Rosefeldt's images depict the desolate landscape and ruins. Both in *The Land of Drought* and in *Penumbra*, the artist keeps spectators at a distance with aerial images that remove the human perspective and allude to technologies harnessed by authoritarian governments for the control of populations.

Increasingly, more figures dressed in white lab suits emerge to inspect the ruins of civilisation – which are in fact abandoned film sets close to the Moroccan Atlas Mountains. The overall-clad bodies appear in stark contrast to the dull landscape, like alien visitors who were perhaps once familiar with this ruined wasteland.

Halfway through, the audience is transported to the comparably bleak Ruhr area of Germany where the remains of industrialisation lie. The same 'scientists' prowl the abandoned mining region, amidst the headframes and coal-pits, wandering across lonely land before finally descending upon an amphitheatre. As seen from the audience's heavenly outlook, the amphitheatre resembles an eye, and its all-seeing ability is reflective of the panoptic aerial viewpoint. Thus, a dialogue unfolds between the two perspectives of control: the eye on the ground and the drone's eye overhead. As the steady hum livens to a climatic rhythm, the figures draw close only to disperse again. Reminiscent of cell division, the unifying aesthetics hint at a prospective optimism amidst a dislocated world man has created.

E. Lapper

Co-produced by Ruhrtriennale

Funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation

With friendly support of the association of friends and supporters of Ruhrtriennale e.V.

CREDITS

Penumbra

2019/2021

1-channel film

Computer-generated and shot on HD

Stereo sound

Aspect ratio 16:9

1:30' loop

Ed. 6 + 2 patron editons + 2 AP

Film Credits

Computer-generated segment

Project Lead: Marvin Sprengel

CG Artists: Bertrand Flanet, Elias Kremer, Vincent Maurer, Merlin Stadler

Additional Texturing: Caroline Keulertz, Annkathrin Kluss

Satellite Imagery Retouching: Mona Keil

Satellite Imagery provided by European Space Imagery and Maxar Technologies

Parts of the computer-generated segment were produced at the Animationsinstitut of Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg

Rave segment

Director of Photography: Christoph Krauss

Phantom Operator: Marcel Neumann

Costume Design: Birgitt Kilian

Hair & Make-Up: Katharina Rebecca Thieme

1st AD: Simon Adegbenro

Production Manager: Viktor Jakovleski

Production Assistant: Mayra Magalhaes

Set Manager: Benjamin Sheppard

Ass. Set Manager: Ruben Stallmann

Set PA: Jan Hemayatkar-Fink

Ass. Costume Designer: Susi Hinz

Ass. Hair & Make-Up: Katharina Thiele

1st AC: Kai Lachmann

2nd AC: Christoph Kollmann

Video Operator: Lena Leuschner

Drone Pilot: Martin Rinderknecht

Drone Camera Operator: Nikolaj Georgiew

Production Drivers: Daniel Janssen, Vincent Lechat

DJ's: Sama', Richie Hawtin, Fadi Mohem, Stenny

Event Manager: Branimir Peco

Ass. Event Manager: Jennifer de Negri

Guestlist Coordinator: Laura Käding

Guest Coordinators: Ferdinand Klotzky, Katja Burlyga

Technician Richie Hawtin: Chris Lundie

Equipment Rental: Fabian Stiehler

Graphic Design: Anja Lekavski

Editor: Bobby Good

Colorists: Steffen Paul, Johannes Röckl

VFX & Online: Sebastian Mietzner

Sounddesign: Thomas Appel

Production Management and Research: Flinder Zuyderhoff-Gray

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And to the entire film and postproduction team.

Produced by Opera Ballet Vlaanderen

Co-produced by Fondazione In Between Art Film and Sammlung Wemhöner

Shot in the woods north of Berlin, Germany, 2019

Written, directed and produced by Julian Rosefeldt

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In the Land of Drought

2015/2017
1-channel film
Shot on HD
Stereo sound
Aspect ratio 2,35:1
43' 15" loop
Ed. 6 + 2 AP

Film Credits

Executive Producer: Wassili Zygouris
Director of Photography: Christoph Krauss
Drone Camera: Billy Gropper, Nicolas Lutz
Drone Pilots: Severin Wegener, Holger Hirsch
Editor: Viktor Jakovleski
Additional Editor: Bobby Good
Postproduction Supervisors: Jan Schöningh, Manolo Bautista
Sound Design: Fabian Schmidt, Julian Rosefeldt

Team Morocco

Executive Producer: Karim Debbagh
Production Coordinator: Seloua El Gouni
Location Manager: Hicham Zaari
Assistants Location Manager: Khalid El Maya, Hicham Elliq
Extra Coordinator: Brahim Choukri
Assistant Extra Coordinator: Youssef Belghiti
Production Drivers: Mbarek Abid, Mohamed Abdelkrim
Animal Trainer: Nahid

Team Ruhr Area

Production Coordinators: Philip Decker, Stephanie Funk, Elisabeth Krefta, Susanne Blank
Dramaturgy: Tobias Staab
Catering: Bobori

Shooting Locations Morocco

Atlas Film Studios Ouarzazate and surroundings, Atlas mountains, Dades valley, Erg Chebbi, Jbel Saghro

Shooting Locations Ruhr Area

ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe AG (Duisburg), Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord (Duisburg), RWE Power AG (Garzweiler), Bergwerk Prosper-Haniel (RAG Deutsche Steinkohle, Bottrop), LWL-Industriemuseum Henrichshütte (Hattingen), NRW.URBAN PHOENIX West (Dortmund), Kokerei Zollverein (Essen)

Thanks to:

the crew and extras

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Co-produced by Ruhrtriennale

Funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation

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Shot in Morocco and the Ruhr area, Germany, 2015

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