

Destroyer of Worlds

Link to our video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaiF0Bq0_so&t

For the practical assignment we decided to produce a YouTube video dealing with the causes and consequences of climate change, reminiscent of a contemporary movie trailer. We chose to orient ourselves along the structure of a trailer for two reasons: Firstly, because a trailer can construct a narrative in a short time and evoke strong emotions. Secondly, a trailer usually solicits and summarizes a movie that is “coming out soon” and we liked it playing a metaphor on the future implications of environmental destruction and Climate Change.

We didn't shoot any video ourselves but used clips downloaded directly from YouTube, from videos that had already repurposed them in different contexts.

Capitalizing on the opportunities that an aesthetic approach towards a political issue provided us with, our aim was to make the audience not only think about the relationship human society has developed to its natural environment, but also feel something about it.

What we are missing as a society- internationally and nationally - is preventive measures by social principals such as governments to secure sustainable and fair development and modernisation without destroying the place we inhabit. LaTour (2011) has described this problem as the lack of *Politics of Nature* in politics. This human error cannot only be attributed to insolence for missing institutional, social and economic policies, but has been “active denial” by the past elites for the sake of emancipation (LaTour, 2011).

After seeing this video and other footages of mass extinction, it might strike one as obvious that we are living *Idiocracy*. It is hard to pinpoint a starting point, but Greek Philosophy is never a bad entrance to illuminate how the constructions of our social world have brought us here. Given the existence of the Westphalian State and the hegemonic position of Western Science, it is safe to say that Climate Change is closely associated to the “fairytale of eternal economic growth” and other perks of the modern state, conditioned by globalised Western theories and ideas (Thunberg, 2019). Eugen Drewermann (1991) outlines in detail in his book *Der tödliche Fortschritt* (The Deadly Progress) how Christianity, one of the fundamentals of European thought and society, has paved the way for the deadly human progress aka Ego.

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over [...] all the Earth [...]” (Genesis 1:26)

Aristotle's books on Politics constitutes the basis of (European) political science, however, the work of interest for human annihilation is his Natural Philosophy, so natural sciences, which is the arch enemy of the Catholic church. Clearly, the Holy Providence prohibits the idea of a non-anthropocentric world view, thus opposed and knowingly ignored these claims, even until today (Drewermann, 1991). This argumentation doesn't contend that Christianity is inherently bad nor that Western scholars subscribe to it, rather that European thought got conditioned by this prior world view and with it, society/science got disenchanting during the Enlightenment. This process of disenchantment occurred in the Weberian sense as well as in an alternate version by Descola connected to demystification of Nature (Descola, 2013). Even most atheist scholars like Marx who was influenced by Hegel in his work (Kershaw, 2012), making the human a product of society rather than of nature and nature can only be grasped by its improvement. So, it's the human purpose to decompose nature and to recompose it on a higher level for human advantage. In this view, human and nature are separated and opposed to each other (Drewermann, 1991). When thinking about the

work of social scientists during that period, we have an easy time to find important contributions revolving around the source of human suffering and emancipation, but not on how industrial capitalism also made a commodity out of nature and animals.

Paradoxically, while the Enlightenment stripped the individual from its religious ties and allowed for self-fulfilment and autonomy, in the wake of natural sciences, the human had to objectively accept that its role in this world is not as important and central as anticipated (Drewermann, 1991). LaTour (2011) states that modernisation and materialism has disconnected humans from nature and their freedom and independence. We have forgotten what we broke free from the Enlightenment, from mental, spiritual and structural oppression, not from our material dependencies on nature. Although we have been managing territory, natural resources and their exploitation, it hasn't been so long that we have created measures to ensure a sustainable development and to respect the environment we inhabit (LaTour, 2011). The developments in the last centuries conditioned the human to deny to be reliant on anything, even the home of its very existence – this planet.

We are supposed to be the most intelligent species after all...say, anthropocentric perspective. If we illustrate intelligence by comparing the behaviour of the modern human predator and animal predators, everyone that watches *Our Planet* learned that predators never e.g. eat all the population of their prey and that altering their environment can mean more dangers to survival (Stark, 2019). However, our social world has gained more importance than our natural world, and the relationship between scientists and politicians loses its objectivity. It is impossible for political actors to represent the common good and/or will, given the shift from a matter of fact to matters of concern, since multiple interests are brought forward on the agenda and it's impossible to rely on scientists to solve disputes - scientists represent like politicians different niches of interest (LaTour, 2011). We are not the pinnacle of creation, we are one of them all, but we are victims of our own constructions.

The Video

In the beginning the audience can see and hear ice shelves collapsing. The ice takes up all of the screen, the cracking sound is loud and has a heavy bass. After 5 seconds string music starts to fade in. At the 27 second mark the speech of Greta Thunberg is audible. This combination of audio-visual material plays out throughout the first half of the video. At the 1:14 mark Thunberg's speech is finished. At this point a piano joins the music, introducing a rhythm to the soundtrack, coupled with an increase in volume. What follows are scenes of burning oil fields, crowded cities, polluted water, burning forests and people on a rubbish dump. The video clips are muted. Throughout the second half of the video, the audience can hear bits of Oppenheimer's words commenting on the invention of the nuclear bomb. When the soundtrack stops the video closes with a portrait shot of two girls looking into the camera and Oppenheimer's words: "The Destroyer of Worlds."

To create a particular narrative and evoke certain emotions in the viewer, we employed a different stylistic devices and editing styles - we remixed and recontextualized uploaded content from YouTube.

We used Thunberg's UN speech and the scenes of collapsing ice shelves to set the context for the video. The melting of the polar ice caps may be the most well-known consequence of global warming. Images of those and the speech combined, establish Climate Change and/or Global Warming as the context for the video.

The scenes displayed in the latter half aren't necessarily connoted with Climate Change on their own. They should create the feeling of immediate threat because they have an overwhelming effect, for example, the burning oil fields of Kuwait from the movie *Baraka* (1992) show the destructive capabilities of humankind, but (in collective memory) they aren't directly linked to the issue of Climate Change.

The time lapse footage of urban streets depict scale and tempo of modern human societies, but don't make an explicit statement about its consequences. The same applies to the chicken on the production line, the forest fire and the struggling bird and mostly to the words of Oppenheimer. Only by pairing these scenes with the previously displayed scene of collapsing ice shelves and Thunberg's speech they get related to consequences they have for the environment. As Rik Smit, Ansgard Heinrich and Marcel Broersma (2017) say: "the material we accessed on YouTube was decontextualized, detached from its meaning in a historical context." As uploaders we "cooperate in rearranging and reassembling items, thus reactivating mediated memory of past events in terms of the present" (Smit et al., 2017).

The second half of the video is cut at a faster pace, contrasting with the slower first half. The fast edit is intended to create a feeling of urgency. We also muted the sound of the videos to increase the dramatic effect of the soundtrack. Throughout the rest of the video the audience can hear a shortened version Oppenheimer's words: "we knew the world would not be the same...few people laughed...few people cried...most people were silent...now I've become death...the Destroyer of Worlds" In context of the video the quote could be interpreted as a message from the future, as someone commenting on a time in which people knew that the technological progress of humanity would lead to the inhabitability of its own environment, but remained ignorant.

Bibliography

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Kershaw, T. (2012). *Karl Marx*. The Hollowverse (Blog). <https://hollowverse.com/karl-marx/>.

LaTour, B. (2011). *Politics of Nature: East and West Perspectives*. *Ethics & Global Politics*, 4:1, 71-80.

Smit, R., Heinrich A., and Broersma M. "Witnessing in the New Memory Ecology: Memory Construction of the Syrian Conflict On Youtube." *new media and society* 19, no. 2 (2017): 289-307.

Stark, M. (Producer & Director). (2019). *Our Planet*. London, United Kingdom: Silverback Films & Netflix.

The Bible.

Youtube Links to our source material:

Audio:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfCUcDAISKk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pPDKwWNkKg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb13ynu3Iac>

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hC3VTgIPoGU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23EmJYSjW-g&t>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGCWVuzzrSQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9tOXY2GNxI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1P9syq3f6hO&t>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSINqSvSVyM&t>