



*NeoArctic, 2016 (Andreas Sommer)*

# NEOARCTIC 12 Songs. 12 audio Images. 12 Landscapes. 1 Planet.

By Kathrine Winkelhorn

The Anthropogenic is the starting point for the performance of *NeoArctic (2016)* – a new geological epoch, defined by the human disruption of the ecosystem to an unprecedented extent. Man has become a natural force that causes rapid, violent changes on the planet Earth. The performance is an investigation of how the Anthropogenic can be expressed through aesthetic and musical mixtures. *NeoArctic* was developed during a long research period in collaboration with artists and researchers and scientists from inside and outside Denmark. The dramaturgical structure for the performance was developed on the basis of “The Anthropogenic Project” at *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin and their definitions of the notions of *Grain*, *Vapor*, *Ray*. Grain represents the sensory qualities of materials and particles, Vapor the volatile and Ray, radiation as energy. As a whole these three notions exemplify what is characteristic of the Anthropogenic: the diversity in highly dynamic changes, which are timed processes that may not necessarily be observed. Independently of scale, microstructures are merged into global ecological processes. In an anthropogenic context, all this is involved at the same time. From Grain, Vapor, Ray, twelve song titles were given to the Icelandic writer Sjón, two composers (British, Andy Stott and Latvian, Kristis Auznieks) as well as video artists and costume designers.

GRAIN: 1 Song for Plastic. 2 Song for Dust. 3 Song for Mud. 4 Song for Minerals.  
VAPOR: 5 Song for Infinity. 6 Song for Respiration. 7 Song for Turbulence. 8  
Song for Chance.  
RAY: 9 Song for Electricity. 10 Song for Temperature. 11 Song for Optics. 12  
Song for Colors.

As a ritual tribe, 12 singers from the *Latvian Radio Choir* appear in futuristic suits and with artifacts as messengers from the future. Time is made to stand still while the notions of climate changes transformed into poetical metaphors are sung again and again. The music is both catchy and challenging at the same time. Acoustic chorus sounds harmonize with electronic universes, which act as abstract soundscapes with a rhythmic throbbing pulse. Each new song is visualized as huge projections on a moving backdrop while the chorus moves into new configurations. Human figures disappear and emerge as part of the mutations of the images.

Forever changing plastics, dust, mud, and minerals, become patterns and form. Infinity becomes a landscape of ice that quickly melts and eventually disappears with the words: *Once upon a time there was nothing in our world.* *Respiration* is the sun, which rhythmically pulsating changes like the black lung, the green lung, the blue lung, etc. *Turbulence* is the global environmental disaster brutally truncated with choppy stuttering singing. *Chance* is the only human song, in which the chorus is standing still viewing the horizon’s darkness

with the words: *and the home you leave is never the home you return to. Electricity* appears as visual interferences and crackling impulses. *Temperature* is shouted as a war cry by the chorus who are standing on a map of the global world and who are repeatedly sucked into the northern hemisphere to eventually disappear completely from the surface of the Earth. With *Optics* the landscape is turned into futuristic constructions that slowly rise and descend around cowl-clad singers in an image reminiscent of a medieval altarpiece.

But who are these people who populate the stage and where do they come from? We hear the voices but cannot decide who is singing and cannot distinguish men from women. “Once a human body enters Kirsten Dehlholm’s theater, it becomes an alien body. It seems not so much created of flesh and blood as of time and space. But at the same time the figures on the stage radiate presence, while much of what usually signals human presence is strangely absent”, as Monna Dithmer writes. Despite its abstract subject, and despite its stylized tableaux, *NeoArctic* is a sensuous performance. Through music, movement, poetry, the images of a tottering world are shaped with food for thought.

The alarming beauty of the images enralls the spectator. The poetic lines explode with significance when they meet Dehlholm’s anthropogenic image universe and establish an interior dialogue with the audience. *NeoArctic* does not preach, but the performance does not conceal the fact that the end of the world may be just around the corner. Finally, colorful, strange insects and microbes survive all of us, in a stroboscopic celebration of rhythm and color, while a single human figure stands all alone with its back towards the audience in a sea of blue light. Lastly it also disappears and we are left with our inherent longing for beauty, which does give space for some kind of hope. *NeoArctic* is at the same time a live performance, a concert, and a film, thus appearing as a hybrid or a new breakthrough in the performing arts as a novel form of opera.



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