

ON TELOS

Traces

Artist and writer Sandra Man invited me to write a text in response to “Telos”, a video she shot with dancer Assi Pakkanen in the remote landscape of an alpine glacier.

I first experienced this video poem in its public presentation, in the frame of Last Open Spaces at Tanzfabrik at the end of 2022. In this occasion, after the performance “in Return” by Moritz Majce, “Telos” was projected on large scale on a wall, the audience was seated or lying down on the floor of the studio. This year I returned to this space poem in the privacy of my home, on a smaller and more intimate scale.

The following is a mixture of descriptive and poetic writing about and inspired by “Telos”, where I put into words the sensations it triggered in my body as a viewer.

Icy blue light
tickles the optic nerve,
constricted pupils
meet
an exposed landscape.

Mountain, sky, water
fading in
from darkness,
fading out
their sublime
nature.

My witnessing is mirrored
by another,
human in stillness
made humble
by the mountains.



Sandra Man | Still Shot „Telos” w/ Assi Pakkanen

The dancer Assi Pakkanen seen from the back in the foreground, she is seated on a cement structure, facing a landscape of mountains with patches of snow, rock formations and a lake.

To my knowledge a space poem is a non-narrative video work that engages the viewer's perception through subtle visual and auditory stimuli that, per synaesthesia, activate other senses in the body. It is poetry made of images, cuts and soundscapes that trigger the viewer's imagination and open up spaces for contemplation and personal interpretation.

In "Telos" Sandra Man transports us to a hydroelectric power-plant in the Austrian alps, where an ancient glacier is transformed into a reservoir-lake, rocks are stacked into separation walls, and this isolated landscape embraces human purpose. Telos is a term that refers to purpose or final end, and it is perhaps one of the most debated concept in 21st century philosophy; its problematic connotation is the reason why it became the title of the work. In encountering this place, the artist felt that this landscape is telos, she felt that something is continuously coming to an end.

Touched
by the gentle breeze,
water waves,
hair swirls,
skin ripples.

Under the surface
everything moving,
blood flowing
breath blowing
grass growing.

Migrating clouds
caressing.
The mountainside
confronted
by human purpose.

Here the solitary, almost alienated human body of the dancer Assi Pakkanen, becomes the viewer's guide, into a sensorial journey of (re-)connecting to the world, of diving into the place and of grounding onto a foreign environment. In the opening shot, we, as viewers of the screened image, are mirrored by the dancer, who is gazing at the landscape in complete stillness. The mountains, the lake and the sky also seem immovable, until the breeze caresses the water, rippling its surface in our direction and reaching and dancing through the dancer's hair. A thought arises about the constant flux of moving processes unfolding under apparent stillness; lungs expanding and contracting, a porous exchange between inside and outside.

A crinkly sound
creeps in
the ear.
Channeled by music
a parallel dimension.

She looks down
at the onlooker.
Does the mountain feel
touched by her
gaze?

A slow fading transition transports us to a new scenery, I am reminded of slow gradual changes leading up to a tipping point, which in environmental studies is the point at which an ecosystem, subject to small changes, reaches a sudden irreversible transformation or collapse. Are we living on the verge of many different tipping points? And is climate change our new relationship to the environment?

At the meeting point between the mountainside and a constructed wall of rocks, the dancer is looking back at us from above, again in stillness but this time as if frozen in a leap of descend. Breaking the long encompassing silence, a crinkly sound enters our sonorous attention, opening a parallel dimension to that of the visual experience. In this scene the dancer crouches down on a large rock, standing at the shore of the lake, she is bended forward over her legs, looking at the rippling surface of the water. In a slow and posed pace she unfolds, lifting through a vertical vector, like a growing plant that pushes its stem up towards the light, while grounding down through its roots.

With her movement she becomes a strange being at the same time native and estranged to the place, her story is a non-narrative journey of grounding presence.

To be grounded is to be in touch, and the body is touched by the landscape as it touches it. We encounter the dancer again in a different corner of the site, she engages playfully with a stone, which could be the size of her liver, the shape of it reminds me of this organ, or my idea of it.

She rolls it over the ground with her finger tips and then her body, balancing it and playing with its weight. The soundscape has transformed into a musical composition made of deep drone vibrations, accentuated by high pitched stridulations. In my perception, the music and the image create an emotional contrast with each other.

The stone leaves its traces of soil on her white suit, as the viewer witnesses the unknown histories and traces left by human activity on the nature of this site.

Balancing a rock
on her body,
bodies
balancing
on the earth.

Softness and presence,
a sensorial journey
of embodiment.
I can smell
a melting glacier.

The final shot is a panoramic view over the lake shore, dotted by white rocks, among which the dancer is blending in with her path. Walking in the distance she leaves us behind. A nostalgic instrumental melody accompanies the departure of the human body, replaced by a human voice in the sound score. Short snippets of NASA recordings, trigger my imagination of outer space exploration and questions on the human enterprise of discovery and conquest.