

JANIS RAFA

Landscape Depressions, 2023

video with 5.1 surround sound, 26 min

Text: Aristide Antonas

No cataclysm, no seismic vibration, no rivers flooding, no overflow of neighboring waters, no unforeseen landslide.

And from a technical viewpoint, everything functioned as expected, everything operated according to design intent, within the specifications set, so that every part of the immense construction would fulfill its specific role.

None of the six alarms in the access tunnel were activated, the bottom outlets were of no use, while the dispersion valves weren't triggered.

Silence apparently reigned at the control desk as well as in the dispersion valve control room.

No reason to operate the spillway.

No change occurred that would trigger any corresponding safety measures.

The safety valves were idle.

There was no reason for the automatic safety mechanisms to operate.

After so many years of operation, the technical project and the landscape are inseparable.

The landscape seems to have become a construction.

The technical project didn't only construct buildings.

The technical project built an artificial landscape that it actually continues to silently preserve.

Something wrong happened.

But whatever happened wasn't due to a malfunction or mistake.

And although everything calculated appeared normal.

Although so many factors were calculated.

Although it's the model that guarantees relevance relative to what's called "Umwelt" in German.

In other words, the technical way the constructed nature operated.

Despite all this, before the gigantic project was constructed there, despite the efforts to create a lake, without changing anything around it, despite efforts to add only one lake where no lake existed, there were obvious changes in the region.

And, apparently, there were unseen changes.

The place is not the same as it was before the project.

The result is a liquid version of the previous natural setting with the reservoir full of water.

The result is a scenography of nature.
An unnatural nature.
Not something the initial word “nature” signified.

Yes, the gauges would supposedly control the structure’s behavior.
The instruments would regulate whatever can and can’t, supposedly, be done.
But they wouldn’t measure what they weren’t called upon to measure.
And the elements they didn’t measure were more important than what they did measure.
Everything happening around the lake created new cycles of action that, while resembling natural repetitive actions, were already part of the special scenography.

The project’s length exceeded 1,000 meters.
An elongated cut-and-cover trench runs through it.
The main access tunnel was constructed over the trench.

In other words, the dam access tunnel
runs through the entire length of the dam foundation.
The various instruments monitoring dam behavior are located inside the tunnel.

In the three safety rooms, next to the waterproof workwear, boots, and breathing masks, one
hears the various devices making light knocking sounds.

Occasionally, someone would stay overnight at the control desk during the night shift.
Everything was quiet.

There was a makeshift bed.
But in recent years, no one spent the night inside the dam.

The dam access tunnel keeps the dam and the artificial lake alive.
Let it remain unseen and undetected by any watchful eye surveying the landscape.
The dam access tunnel is the landscape’s living secret.

Several years have passed since the great project was completed.
The large dam was enough to flood
this particular mountain depression.

Within a few months the entire landscape was completely flooded and the water covered the
large airport as well, covered the church of the plains, covered the still unpaved streets.

The large project might have influenced more factors than those examined.
Perhaps the enterprise disregarded something critical.
Or, perhaps, it was just a calculation error.

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