

David Zink Yi's two-channel video installation *The Strangers* (2014), created for the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, is based on a two-month sojourn in the southern Andes near Ayacucho, Peru. In an 81-minute loop the two large-screen projections picture—at times separately, at times in parallel—workers in the gold and silver mines surrounded by screamingly loud machines, crumbling rock, puddles of water, and artificial light, as well as mute, futuristic rock formations out in the landscape that almost seem like statues. The contrast between untouched nature and its exploitation as a material resource could not be greater or the plot more minimal: Zink Yi views spaces as resonance chambers in which sensual expression and formal reduction are merged. The title *The Strangers* suggests both man's alienation from his work, from nature, and from his home surroundings, and the bizarre rocks that confront us like creatures from some alien world.

The viewer waits in vain for some kind of plot or narrative. Zink Yi presents the workers' 12-hour shift in shots between one and five minutes long that capture the suffocating underground atmosphere; between bestial, quivering machines and dark masses of stone the men work like mere hod carriers. And the light, vast, rocky landscapes have something archaic and surreal about them, a sense that is heightened by the absence of a soundtrack. Their glowing sedimentary rock surfaces seem now like a cracked painting, now like frozen faces, bodies of animals, or totem sculptures—but here as well there is no narration.

As in his earlier works—for example *Horror Vacui*, in which Zink Yi directed his camera a bit too long at the individual musicians of a Cuban band—here the documentary approach shifts between two basic moods that are diametrically opposed, each with a somewhat mystical, ritualistic quality. Thanks to the abstract, repetitive structure of his compositions, which as a diptych in simultaneous cuts evoke similarities and associations, the viewer is drawn into a physical relationship with the images—comparable to the primal forms of Minimal Art and Land Art, which create a consciousness of one's surroundings and one's own body. With its lingering focus on the protruberances and cavities of rock, the

work takes on a distinctly sculptural quality. Tied to this is its perception of time: the fact that our own impressions hardly correspond to the actual length of the projection is reflected in the issue of how long it takes for rock to assume a given shape, and how quickly it is turned into new shapes in the process of its exploitation. Paired with this is the acoustic element: the switching from the drilling, hammering, and grinding of the Sisyphean extraction process—from one ton of rock roughly 23 grams of silver and 1 gram of gold are retrieved—to the soundless landscapes of rock, snow, and lichen evokes, depending on the cut, either a sense of painful brutality or peaceful silence.

In fact, the abrupt changes of scene, like the long, uneventful shots, recall the haunting cinematic style of Michelangelo Antonioni, who time and again in his films focused on man's alienation from modern life. For example, in *Zabriskie Point* (1970) the desert to the east of Los Angeles becomes a metaphor for the primeval, while the city is presented as an exploitation machine; the desert is seen as something to market, a place where one can profit from man's yearning for natural living space. Here there is a hint of Antonioni's tendency toward Existentialism, inspired in large part by Martin Heidegger. In his lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953) Heidegger disclosed the earth as a mere resource, one seen only from the point of view of how it can be made useful by means of technology. "The earth now reveals itself as a coal field, the ground the site of ore deposits." He pointed out the way modern technology dominates, not only ravaging the biological foundations of life but alienating man from himself.

In *The Strangers* Zink Yi focuses on the exploitation of the earth through the power of machines and of men under demeaning working conditions, yet he opposes this, without being moralistic, with a perception of nature that emphasizes its poetic potential. The consequences of colonialism, terrorism, and globalization that are leading to an economic boom and environmental destruction in today's Peru give way to a consideration of stone, earth, and nature as sculpture.

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