

America, as no less than the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has noted, is a phenomenon that one cannot do justice to on a theoretical level alone. Only through the experience of seeing, personal encounter and the act of traveling will this complex land reveal itself to an European perspective: "Where the others spend their time in libraries, I spend mine in the deserts and on the roads. Where they draw their material from the history of ideas, I draw mine (...) from the life of the streets, the beauty of nature".*

From 2012 to 2014 Cyrill Lachauer traveled across the western states of the U.S. From his base in Los Angeles he set out to explore the territory between Nevada and South Dakota, traveling along the Walker River all the way to Wounded Knee. He followed the route of the „Ghost Dance“ - a Native American ritual often described as an act of non-violent resistance. It is a form of ecstatic dance that has been traced to Wovoka, a medicine man of the Paiute tribe who prophesied that if practiced long enough the dance would bring peace. Peace in the sense that the white race would not advance any further west but would limit their settlement to the eastern regions. That this would not prove true is a well-known, tragic fact of the United State's violent history.

For different reasons Lachauer chose this rite as a frame for his exploration of the U.S. It forged a path away from the country's flashy metropolises to the backcountry, presenting a view - especially in the photographic part of the work - of the American landscape. A landscape that the artist began to perceive as a "narrative landscape". Lachauer uses the term landscape in a broader sense. For him the word comprises animals, humans and empty spaces and he claims that history itself - including colonization, the wars against Native Americans and a 20th century defined by capitalism - has inscribed itself in the landscape and space, in the stone, soil and vegetation and can be reconstructed through the traces it has left behind.

At the same time the „Ghost Dance“ also serves as a symbol for the artist's journey through the country. Lachauer describes the work on the photographs as an endless back and forth. Not only because he continually returned to Los Angeles, only to set out again into the country's interior, but also because the pictures express a mixture of reserved distance and of the sympathy and interest that moved him to get to know the country and its people.

In the film „Full Service“ the dance-like motion and rhythm are stylized into a striking artistic element. The clattering sound that Mexican immigrants make on the streets of Las Vegas at night as they strike together the calling cards of prostitutes lends the exhibition a soundtrack that may inspire viewers to initiate their own forms of motion and perception.

As remarkable as the difference may at first seem between Las Vegas - the city that Hunter S. Thompson once said was at the "heart of the American dream" - and Lachauer's contemplative search for historical traces and immersion in regions completely distant from that dream, the two visions are actually interwoven when one considers that the artist is a traveler. A traveler casting a bluntly subjective look at the U.S., which considering its size, complexity and all the myths that have long since superimposed themselves over the country like a second reality, seems simply incomprehensible.

* Baudrillard, Jean. America. Translated by Chris Turner. New York / London: Verso, 1989, p. 63.

Due to Lachauer's background as an ethnologist and interest in colonial history and the fate of indigenous cultures, „Full Service“ has often been interpreted as a work of ethnological field research. Yet an ethnologist must become a part of the culture that he studies. He must accept the culture without prejudice or reservation, directly experience and internalize it, in order to finally examine it according to objective criteria. With „Full Service“, however, Lachauer seeks to demonstrate that this is impossible. His view of the Midwest shows that one's outlook on the foreign is always personal. And that the foreign is often used as a construction, which is comfortable because in this way one's own position - even if this position can become flexible for a certain period of time - must neither be adjusted nor questioned.

Christina Landbrecht

Cyrill Lachauer (born in 1979) lives in Berlin. He studied film and cultural anthropology in Munich and fine arts at the UdK, Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Museum Villa Stuck, Munich and at the artothek - Raum für junge Kunst, Cologne. He has received grants by the Stiftung Kunstfonds, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, and Villa Aurora, Los Angeles. His works are included in the Goetz Collection in Munich and in the collection of the Berlinische Galerie, Berlin. Cyrill Lachauer developed the work „Full Service“ in collaboration with the curator Anna Schneider.

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