

Travelogue

Andreas Oskar Hirsch^{DE}

*1972

Radio Editor & Mothership Pilot

Sound Development City 2014 participant Andreas Oskar Hirsch undertook his second expedition as a team member, *Gap Station* host and driver of the mothership. In the following text, *Synchronicity Saved the Cat*, Andreas retraces the 2016 expedition from his perspective, focusing on the daily challenges and shifts, his encounters in the cities and the journey itself.

As an artist, Andreas Oskar Hirsch produces visual works, sound, music and texts. His interests therein lie particularly in strategies of translation and conveyance of meaning, absurd experimental setups and the development of imaging, sound-based and performative processes. He has invented various instruments that he performs with, such as the electric palm leaf and the carbophon, among others. Andreas is a co-founder of makiphon, a label for experimental music, and lectures and teaches in the field of visual arts and music.

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*Synchronicity
Saved
the Cat*

Friday, September 2
Early morning, 150 km from Lyon,
Aire de Beaune rest stop

An espresso, refuelling, then an oil check and once round the mothership like the pilot of a passenger plane. The mothership is a Hymermobil motorhome from the '80s, just under 7 metres in length. It has all kinds of idiosyncrasies that demand to be respected, otherwise quite a bit can get out of control. For instance, the curtain that goes around the bed when it is let down over the front seats for sleeping. If you forget to stash the curtain away properly beneath the mattress the next morning after putting up the bed, it may just come down while driving full steam ahead and block your vision through the windscreen — an absurd and frightening thought.

After a nerve-racking start the previous evening, several hundred kilometres of night-driving and a few hours' sleep, I start to adjust to the road as my temporary living space. French rest stops are like oases of peace and relaxation, with shiatsu massage chairs, children's play areas, all kinds of food and beverages, oil for thirsty engines and orientation map series. It is also easy to strike up conversations with people, for you are all in the same boat, so to speak. Confederates of the road.



South of France, past Avignon, Nîmes and Montpellier, towards the Spanish border. 30° C, surprisingly relaxed traffic. The mothership purrs. In terms of toughness, it can easily hold its own against the little donkey that adorns the front of the bonnet with the colours of the Catalan flag. When I pass the Spanish border, it is already dark. In Girona, the satnav mistakenly takes me through the southern foothills of the Pyrenees instead of remaining on the more level AP7. While we crawl up the hill, the mothership and I both regret our mistake. On the other hand, what's the point of a donkey without some good old mountains? The next morning, at the rest stop near Gurb, the first thing I catch sight of is the inscription on a truck: the power of experience.



Around 10:00 PM, after two and a half days' driving, I approach Madrid. When driving into the city, it seems huge, a complicated system of slip roads and motorways extending right into the centre. On my arrival at Hotel Gran Legazpi, the biggest garage door I have ever seen opens up — and sleep takes over.

Sunday, September 4

At midday, audio recordings at the entrance to Matadero Madrid, a huge urban

art and cultural centre located directly on the Plaza de Legazpi. The lively calls of birds in the treetops mingle with the background noise of the city. In the Tabacalera, I meet Ana and Cristina, who are providing us with local support. The Tabacalera is a self-managed cultural centre with a certain squatter charm. Formerly a tobacco factory, it now has rehearsal spaces, workshops, studios and halls for music and theatrical performances. This is where the mothership will stay. The city strikes me as a huge desert metropolis, which might be due to the fact that I arrived from the West and did not come through the Sierra de Guadarrama mountain scenery to the north. Cristina and Ana both assure me that Madrid is quite small if you just hang out in the centre. We are out and about between Lavapiés and La Latina, two bustling districts whose hilly streetscape partly dates back to the Middle Ages. In the course of the afternoon, the rest of the team arrive.

Monday, September 5

Down the stairs from the rooftop terrace of our lodgings in Calle Santa Ana with the recorder on; I run into Cristina and Vincent, Vincent having come straight from the airport. It is now 8:00 PM, and most of the shops are closing. A guitar player on the Plaza de Cascorro, young people strolling around. An old woman in a wheelchair, me beside her, all ears and microphones. The atmosphere is relaxed. Later, down the Calle Embajadores, left to the Calle de Lavapiés and on down the hill. People who seem to hail from all corners of the globe: Indians, Chinese, Maghribi, Senegalese, lots of restaurants and

snack bars, 24/7 stores, bars and little shops. On a hand truck, a man is transporting two bouquets of golden daisies through the Calle Amparo, not far from where we are setting up camp in the Nadie, Nunca, Nada, No. The NNNN is a non-profit space that is run and provided to us by the artist Ramón Mateos. The name “Nobody Never Nothing No” sounds quite punk to me and seems to be a reference to the novel *Nadie Nada Nunca* by the Argentinian author Juan José Saer.

Tuesday, September 6

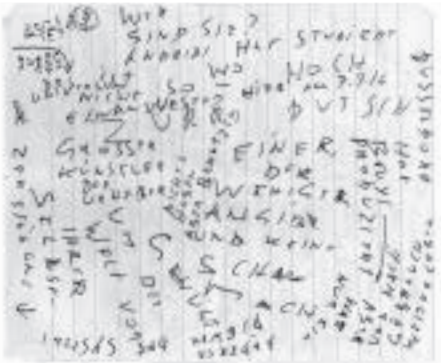
The expedition starts in Retiro Park, right next to the late nineteenth-century Palacio de Cristal, which was modelled on London’s Crystal Palace and originally housed tropical plants from the Philippines. It has since become home to exhibitions curated by the Reina Sofia museum. The palace is largely made of glass and set in an iron framework. Inside the palace, a soft version of the Titanic sinks down from the domed ceiling, large as a whale. Damián Ortega’s sculpture brings a touch of the surreal to the impressive atmosphere inside the palace.

Anyone who has not already met up now gets to know one another, with conversations and drinks in the shade of the trees. Then a stroll through the city, visiting various places that are important for our stay here. The streets are almost empty in the noonday heat—we have a lot to learn when it comes to siesta, but we don’t have much time either . . . the week will be over in a flash. In the Tabacalera we meet Julio, who is in charge of the screen-printing workshop and the photo lab and who will assist us. He comes from Chile but has been

living in Madrid for some years. When he talks, you know he is serious; it's as if a code of honour is shining through him.

Wednesday, September 7

Big Wednesday: In the afternoon, we're off to the Plaza del Dos de Mayo with Andalus, Bernadette and the mothership, where Bernadette embarks on round one with her Café Europa. Young and old are sitting on benches, dogs racing around, kids riding bikes or playing ball. There are thriving cafés around the square, with musicians dotted around. The square is in Malasaña, a district where shops and bars have frequently been changing owners for some time and rents are rising rapidly, as our photographer Jonay tells me. He also explains the background to May 2, 1808, date of the resistance against the Napoleonic troops, and points to the monument commemorating Luis Daoíz and Pedro Velarde, heroes of that revolt.



An old white-haired man approaches, white suit, scrawny frame, his shirt open over a bare chest. He indicates to me that I should take off my cap. He does not speak. When he makes a move to grab my cap, I dodge away. I am not amused. He then takes out a biro and starts writing the word “ZURRI” on a small piece of

lined paper. He looks at me questioningly. I read “Zürri” out loud and realise that he is speech-impaired but seems to be able to hear my words: “I am from Germany.” “WHO ARE YOU” he writes in German — all in large block letters. “Andreas.” “ANDREAS HAS BEEN TO UNIVERSITY,” he writes. I laugh and nod. “WHERE.” “In Cologne.” He writes, “DÜSSELDORF” and then “BEUYS”. Does he maybe come from Düsseldorf himself? Is he German? And is Joseph Beuys the connection with my cap, which he obviously seems to think is expendable? The paper is soon criss-crossed with writing: “BEUYS PRODUCED BUT WAS ONLY ANOTHER SERVANT OF THE SYSTEM.” This is followed by an arrow indicating that I should turn over the page, where I find a neat Asian font, probably Korean, and his lines in-between: “BEUYS’ WIFE HAD THE DOUGH, HE ONLY HAD HIS HAT.” Ah, the hat! “ART CAN SAY OR SUGGEST WHAT WORDS DO NOT CONTAIN: THE INVISIBLE CENTRE AND THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE.” The orthographic jumble over such a minimal space makes it difficult to follow his thought process, but he insists, and I even forget Andalus and Bernadette, who are already busy loading the amplifiers back into the mothership and retracting the awning. “ENOUGH TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM SELF-DESTRUCTION.” Then: “IT WAS A PLEASURE WORKING FOR YOU. I SHALL NOT BE PRESENT ON 7.9.16. THE ORIGINATOR.” “May I have that?” I point to the paper and feel a bit foolish. He looks at me penetratingly: “NEVER MIND ‘HAVE’, BUT USE AND PASS ON AFTER USE”,

is what I gradually can make out. I nod. "Alright."

Later that night, I eat with the team. I invite Luis, the original skater, who has a workshop in the Tabacalera where he builds longboards. He provides us with electricity for the mothership. Luis started skating as a child, then progressed to windsurfing in the Canary Islands, yet eventually he sobered down, starting a family and going into business — big business, it would seem. Until the day he was supposed to shake hands with George W. Bush at a conference. He rather preferred not to and decided to build skateboards, start up cultural exchange projects and sail. Long live course correction!

Luis and I go for a beer. We end up in the Sala Juglar. Live music, a packed audience, open stage. And who is standing on stage, hurling angry phrases at the public and waving his arms around? Julio. Julio? JULIO!!! We can't believe it! Julio from the Tabacalera, who's such a quiet, serious presence in his apron, always ready to help out, is captivating the crowd here. He talks about this neighbourhood, about Lavapiés, social connections across boundaries, Latin America, Africa, the many colours of the neighbourhood, but also the contrasts between rich and poor, progressive gentrification and finally a plea to fight back through means of creativity. And then it's over, and we embrace and congratulate him. "Incredible! Such a coincidence!" I call out, and Julio, "Synchronicity! C.G. Jung!" On the way home, I briefly get lost. The street cleaners are out hosing down the streets, and for a few seconds the spray lingers in the lamplight and clouds the alleys, graffiti on the lowered shutters of the closed shops. "Synchronicity saved the cat," crosses my mind, in the vein of the pessimistic saying "Cu-

riosity killed the cat". Even if it does miss C.G. Jung's concept of synchronicity by a whisker — coincidence be with us.

On the staircase, I meet Vincent, who is just about to take a wander, and I accompany him round the block. He tells me about bark — Madrid is one of the greenest cities in Europe — and he has found an automatic garden with an Arduino irrigation controller. I can almost see his synapses firing. We are all having days here with more happening than most times.

Thursday, September 8

Nik and I visit Raisa Maudit and Zony Gómez, two artists who have a gallery called Storm and Drunk. They are both very energetic and committed to bringing people together and resisting the mainstream with their initiatives and performances. We talk about the art scene here, the mood, the possibilities. Initially, it is pretty easy to get something going, they say, for there are plenty of good people and a lot of enthusiasm in Madrid, but there is a lack of resources, which, in turn, makes work difficult in the long term. The name Storm and Drunk is intended both as a joke and as a connection with the *Sturm und Drang* period in late eighteenth-century German literature, which was a time of upheaval with parallels to today, they say: "If you don't step back a little bit, it is very difficult to understand what is going on right now. Somehow everything seems to be falling apart. In the eighteenth century, there was also a lot of change and revolutions, and they also saw the start of capitalism." Their answer to the question of how they see the future of

S.A.D. takes us back to Retiro Park: “Like the musicians on the Titanic” says Zony, adding with a wink: “Romantic, isn’t it?”

Saturday, September 10

The first of ten artist talks we want to record outdoors. During the interview with Brent, helicopters are continually flying overhead. In the mornings, they seem to fly regularly towards the city centre. We pause briefly and listen to the rattling fade away. Madrid is the seat of government, even if Spain currently doesn’t have a fully functioning government. After the December 2015 election, there were no majorities, Ana and Cristina tell me. At first glance, it doesn’t seem as if everyday life has ground to a halt as a result, however.

Monday, September 12

Nik and I visit Manuel Segade in Lavapiés. Manuel runs the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, CA2M for short, a museum of contemporary art located outside the centre. The aim, out there in the periphery, is to use art to also engage in social issues and education and involve the immediate surroundings. This has led to a majority of CA2M visitors coming from the immediate vicinity. The connections Manuel makes in conversation are sometimes surprising; one of them takes us back to the Plaza del Dos de Mayo and thus to the date in 1808 which became the symbol of resistance against the French under Napoleon. Manuel points out the fact that Napoleon’s attack on his European neighbours came only a short while after the

revolution whose motto had been “liberty, equality, fraternity”. Another dot on my fragmented map of historical knowledge, on which freedom gained is soon reversed into power obsession. He sees overcoming divisive thinking and action on race, gender and class as one of the central challenges of our time, an old complex from the historical point of view, the invocation of fear of the “other”. Along with the economic crisis, more and more people had begun to resist the drama of neoliberalism and its injustice, and at the same time he saw many of these topics reflected to a high degree in pop culture and science fiction — people’s concerns had long become mainstream. And it was time to address these issues more closely in art as well.

In the afternoon, we meet Gema Melgar, who works for Matadero Madrid and was a member of the jury for Sound Development City. The Matadero, which is funded by the city, opened its doors in 2007 to provide a space for exchange, artistic experimentation and production. The old slaughterhouse that now serves as an exhibition area is home to an installation of the artist collective Basurama: countless withered sunflowers hang from the ceiling like corpses, forming a kind of romantically dark, surreal avenue. The collective had initially planted the sunflowers along a boulevard in Ensanche de Vallecas, a giant housing project to the south-east of the city, which originated with the real-estate bubble and now presents a bleak picture.

Tuesday, September 13
On the road again

Bernadette and I leave the city, with three to four days scheduled for the leg to Casablanca. Ari-Pekka's Amigo travels with us in the mothership; in the courtyard of the Tabacalera, the two of them calmly exchanged their clothes. Ari-Pekka now looks as if in a time warp, with Amigo's black floppy hat and the suit that has seen better days. Amigo sits quietly in the back of the camper. It's good to be on the road again after the whirlwind of the past days. Just seeing the landscape passing by, at the wheel or as a passenger when Bernadette takes over. Through Castilla-La Mancha, then through part of Extremadura: arid landscapes with vast planes, mountain ranges in the distance, cattle in the pastures.

In the evening, a good 170 km from Seville, we reach Hotel Acosta — which also happens to be the surname of my friend Scoli, whom I was with on my last trip to Morocco in 2012 to record traditional music in Paul Bowles' footsteps. Bowles had made several trips in 1959 to document music which threatened to become suppressed during the increasing westernisation of the country and, well over 50 years later, we researched in places where Bowles had been.

Wednesday, September 14

Breakfast on the hotel veranda. A gaggle of sparrows clear up the remnants of breakfast. Just a few hundred metres from the hotel is a deserted zoo: El Parque Zoológico de Extremadura, according to

the towering wall which depicts an array of flaking animals like modern-day frescoes. A desolate, almost uncanny sight. In my mind's eye, I put up a ladder to see what is going on inside. I later read that the Almendralejo zoo was shut down several years ago as a result of pressure from animal rights activists. The zoo director was accused of smuggling and cruelty to animals, and finally those animals that were on the endangered-species list were distributed to other zoos in Europe. Apparently, they lost track of some of the other animals, however, and since then nobody knows the whereabouts of the black panther, the leopard, the ostrich, several wolves and lynxes, a spectacled caiman and the anaconda. We proceed along the Ruta de la Plata, passing a stone quarry, olive groves, huge fields with solar panels, and later battalions of wind turbines. Surprisingly, as we go south, it slowly gets a bit greener. One night in Los Caños de Meca, an old hippie enclave. Seeing the sea.



Thursday, September 15
Algeciras

A number of ticket booths, hardly anyone travelling. Sellers call out from behind their glass panes to draw attention to themselves. Some even knock on their windows from inside. The search for the customs office leads through a lock gate to a back office. A friendly, dark-haired woman in her mid-'50s and her colleague, who wants to know where I come from. Turns out he collects buttons from cities.

I apologise for not having any button from Cologne for him, so he gives me a Spanish customs one and sends me on to a low building nearby. His female colleague says she will let them know. Such friendly customs staff, unbelievable!

When I arrive, I meet an older, easy-going customs officer: “Carnet ATA?” Yes, this is the place. He says he just has to settle something with a friend, a Frenchman from Lille. The two disappear briefly, and when they come back, the customs officer cheerfully shows me a plastic bag: “Two kilos of top-quality beefsteak tomatoes!” We go into the office to check the carnet. On the wall, a collage of some 30 black-and-white photos of the harbour, taken in 1976. The top left corner of the collage is eaten away, several copies are missing. “Brexit!” the customs officer yells, and everyone in the room laughs. This was where you saw the rock of Gibraltar before. I show him my button, and he immediately explains the symbolism of the coat of arms. The gearwheel stands for industry, Mercury’s staff for trade, the anchor for shipping and ports, and of course the crown for the kingdom. Amicable “hasta luego” all around and board check-in.



Duscha and Andalus call: Tarek is stuck in the cargo port of Tangier. He is driving some of our equipment from Madrid to Casablanca and had intended to be there by now. Customs searched his

truck and found a toy drone, and then detained Tarek overnight because the entire load appeared suspicious to them. Might we be able to meet up and help clarify the matter? From an armchair at the bow end of the ship, I watch with mixed feelings as the Moroccan coast approaches. 3:00 PM, cloudless blue sky, calm silvery-blue sea. I think of my friend Scoli, who at his departure was detained in Marrakech for a week because his visa had expired. A man snores in the chair next to me. I try the old finger-snapping trick; it works.

When we find Tarek in the port, he has almost resolved the problem but still has to pay harbour dues and parking. The three of us wend our way through the vast terrain. Two officers at an improvised desk. Apparently this isn’t the right place, so on we go to a container office. Obtain a signature, back to the truck exit, pay 425 dirham, then another counter. Now a photocopy is missing, so over to the copy-shop. Back to the counter to get it stamped and, after yet more toing and froing, we are out at last. The drone is lost, however. It’s hard to imagine that Tarek was subjected to this madness for a total of nearly twenty-four hours ...



Westwards along the coastal road towards Tangier. We follow Tarek, who has invited us to spend the night at his place with his family. Ahead of us, the sun is set-

ting, clusters of white houses in the barren, hilly landscape, the foothills of the Rif mountains. Small settlements, the sea to the right and the Spanish coast in the distance. Finally, Tangier. The city centre appears to have had a revamp since the last time I was here.

Tarek's family lives in a multi-storey house in the Beni Makada district. A warm welcome, tea and Moroccan pancakes. Sofas all around, a large flat-screen TV fitting perfectly in an alcove, almost like a shrine. Tarek's wife is there, his son, nephews and cousins. Tarek's father is the only one who speaks French. He deals in safes. He gives me his business card, which has a chart with the various safe models, including size, weight and price. Bernadette reaches for her guitar, everyone joins in, imitating the German refrains, the meaning of which shifts in wonderfully absurd ways. A second meal, Tarek's wife has spit-roasted lamb on the roof — méchoui.

Friday, September 16

Walking through the narrow alleys with Tarek's nephew, Ahmed, down to the mothership, which we left in a guarded carpark. Tarek and his father take the delivery truck that they will later drive to Casablanca together. "Do you like my barrio?" Ahmed asks me in English. "YES!" One block further, a homeless person on the curb. Ahmed says, "Sorry," and I reply, "But we have homeless people as well," which astounds him. "Yes, really, unfortunately, homelessness is universal." Tarek and his father escort us to the motorway. After a few metres, we stop. Tarek makes a phone call. We wait. Some minutes pass,

then Tarek's wife comes running and hands me a neckerchief. She says she wanted to give me something too after giving Bernadette a lightweight djellaba as a present the previous evening. We are amazed at such care and hospitality.

Barren fields, banana plantations with plastic covering, with glimpses of the Atlantic sparkling to the right. Occasionally people at the edge of the motorway, even crossing here and there. Cattle in the pastures, and donkeys standing in the slightly undulating but mostly flat landscape. At one point a large white bird with a crooked beak at the side of the road. Service stations here have no self-service. While the filling station attendant takes care of the mothership, I watch the digits on the display to signal to him — we have agreed on 350 dirham. "We are getting close," I say, and he replies, "Fortunately!" And when the display stops at exactly 350 dirham, I exclaim, impressed, "How did you manage that? What timing!" "No, no," he laughs, it was programmed like that ...



Endless suburbs before Casablanca and, as in Madrid, the impression of an enormous city. Past large buildings, a dusty football pitch, a mosque. Traffic getting ever denser as we approach the centre. By now, Bernadette drives the mothership almost as if it were a car. At first glance, the centre of Casablanca looks fairly run

down, with houses pitted by the humid sea air and half-completed buildings, and then spotless and stately around the next corner. A lot of people, a lot of hustle and bustle. On one corner, a genuine punk girl with a Mohican haircut — I have never seen a punk rocker in Morocco before.

In a small alleyway, we find La Parallèle, a school of dance, music and theatre which a Frenchwoman named Fanny and her friend Ghassan are letting us use before they start with their programme in October. The other members of the team arrived by train from Tangier yesterday, and we also meet Imane and Sofiane, who are helping us here, and Zakaria, the photographer.

Saturday, September 17

Our hotel is located on the edge of the medina in a small square opposite the harbour. Only men here in the cafés, as is so often the case — patriarchy still thrives. Most are wearing Western clothes, a few are in djellabas. The odd tourist making their way across the square towards the hotel, lots of stray cats.

Sunday, September 18

A guided tour through the medina. Samba, a young Mauritanian who works for Casa Mémoire (an association for the protection of the city's architectural heritage) gives us an overview. Casablanca is ancient and was most likely founded thousands of years ago by Berbers. It has seen its share of upheavals in the course of history. In the seventh century, the Arabs

came on the scene and spread Islam. In the late Middle Ages, the city (which had long been called Anfa) became an important port for pirates, which is why the Portuguese attacked and destroyed it in 1468. It was then rebuilt and given the name Casa Branca — Portuguese for “white house”. Their rule lasted until 1755, when the city was again destroyed by an earthquake. The Portuguese withdrew, and once again the city was built up from scratch, now with its Arabic name al-Dār al-bayḍāʾ.

From the canon-studded rampart opposite the harbour, the path leads through the medina. Cobbled lanes, little shops, power lines dangling over the streets, wooden shutters on the white facades of mostly two- or three-storeyed houses, the occasional graffiti. On one corner, two policemen keep an eye on us from their motorcycles, but finally race off. Cats laze around in the heat, dozing. Past the “triangle monothéiste”, where a synagogue, a church and a mosque are closer in proximity than in any other Moroccan medina. On through even narrower lanes full of merchants and finally out of the medina through the Porte de Marrakech. Above us is a clock tower which dates back to the French colonial era. The idea behind mounting the clock was to set a sign for more structure, says Samba, but now the clock is always wrong and nobody bothers.

Monday, September 19

The view from the roof of the Hotel Central. Fishing vessels and military boats in the harbour, a cruise ship further north. Roofs partly crumbling, washing and sat-

elite dishes here and there. I come down the steps just as the man at the front desk is slapping one of the maids. I give him a disapproving look, leave the hotel and turn left through the medina, which is still relatively quiet in the early morning hours. Then on through the newer part of the city, which is simply called Centre Ville and where French colonisation of the early twentieth century has left indelible marks. A mix of neoclassical buildings, art deco and even functionalist architecture. Much of it looks surprisingly modern.

Tuesday, September 20

On the way to La Parallèle, some hard-to-miss graffiti at the Place Oued El Makhazine. It fills the entire facade: A little girl in a red dress is standing amid skyscrapers, the roofs of which barely reach up to her shoulders. She looks cross and is pointedly blocking her ears. I also would rather have some peace today. Late in the afternoon, an opportunity presents itself: off to the Corniche and Casa Surfhouse, with which Imane has connected me. She appears to be a keen surfer herself. When I ask her if it's a problem riding the waves as a woman, she laughs and says, "Il y a beaucoup de dragueurs dans l'eau", the gist of which is that there are lots of guys hanging around in the water, wanting to chat you up. But I can't get away. All the taxis are taken, there is nothing I can do. Can there be anything more stupid than missing a wave because of rush hour? A little later, a music session with Youmna makes up for the frustration.

In the evening, a view of the city from a strangely elevated position: sip-

ping cocktails in the Hotel Tower bar and looking westwards over the white flood of houses to where the sun is slowly sinking into the hazy Atlantic. In the bathroom, a urinal with a lid — an interesting extension to western practices.

To get back to the hotel, Duscha and I jump into one of the red *petits taxis*. The driver, a small, cheerful man in his mid-60s, seems more than happy at his job: "Taxi mezyan!" he keeps yelling, which roughly means "Taxi-driving is great!" — and he is right, it is great. At the traffic lights, he winds down the window, exchanges a few words with his colleagues and laughingly asks them for directions. His enthusiasm is infectious, but at some point we're definitely off course. Together we eventually get there, and everyone is happy.

Wednesday, September 21

A conversation with Zakaria about Berber tribes and many people's mistaken idea that Arabs are everywhere around here. But they only came after the Berbers had already long settled the country, when Berber tribes had already long become differentiated. There are three Berber dialects: Tashelhit, Tamazight and Tarifit. The dialects are so different as to make communication between them difficult, especially in the mountains, where the people do not always speak Moroccan Arabic.

Thursday, September 22

At sunrise, the muezzin seems to be calling from right inside my skull. In the af-

ternoon, an interview with Mehdi Khesouane, who runs the *tlbb Magazine* and combines sustainable design, fashion, gender issues and artistic experiments. "It's nice when art comes to the street," he says, "when the impact is clear. One time, we brought living room furniture to a popular street and we made a square on the ground with tape, then we waited around and observed the reactions. People were very surprised, and they sat down, started to get comfortable and clean up trash as well. It was nice to see how art can directly contribute to society."

Together with a Spanish friend, Mehdi also set up an off-space in an apartment. At some point they had an Italian artist doing a performance in which she started to talk about sexuality and gender questions, "and people were really happy, because they'd never had a place where they could share all these things and just were able to openly think together."

"All this stuff was there, we were just hiding it, but now the new generation in Morocco wants to talk about that and show the reality. With *tlbb Magazine* we want to show the underground, what's happening here in Casablanca. Sometimes we feel so affected by French colonisation that we almost want to be French, but that's stupid. Often you see magazines here that are a copy of what's happening in France, and they put it here, but it's not our image. Or the magazines are complete folklore, but the young people here are not into folklore anymore, they want to be themselves. Morocco is a kind of mix between Arabs, Berbers, Andalusians, Africans, Jews, so we are really rich; why always look for something from Western culture?"

After dinner in the port, a visit to the Vertigo club, where Bernadette, Youmna

and I will be playing tomorrow. In the basement of the bar, there is a little stage. It's a full house: a band made up of a handful of men in drag — energetic drumming, singing, theatrical elements, wild and zany.

Back to the hotel. A homeless man has opened a grate in the pavement; beneath it is a pit where he has got some coal smouldering. He is lying down, preparing something to eat. An old woman is crossing the street, a huge tattered suitcase on her back. In the hotel entrance, the receptionist is smoking his shisha.

Saturday, September 24

A petit taxi takes us to the interview with Dounia Benslimane, who manages Racines, an association promoting cultural mediation and networking. During the journey, a Coke bottle explodes on me, but the driver is cool about it, and I hold the foaming bottle out the window for a while. Dounia explains the objectives of Racines: access to culture as a universal right to self-expression, culture as a social engine of democracy and understanding, culture as an economic factor. And she doesn't shy away from naming the problems: there is no absolute freedom of expression, arbitrary interference by the state in cultural issues, conservatism, problems with illiteracy, a precarious education system — all issues that do not exactly make work any easier. "There is an imbalance between the creative potential that is simmering and boiling up in young people, in artists and cultural workers, and on the other hand we have institutions and politicians who are stepping on the brakes and who are resisting this movement."

There are various reasons for this, she says, above all a culture of anti-culture they had to contend with from the '60s up to the end of the reign of Hassan II: "Culture was regarded as a subversive element and fought. Subjects like sociology or philosophy were removed from curriculums, the focus on folklore was preferred. Which is logical: the stronger a cultural development, the sooner people understand what is happening around them. They will criticise and ask questions. So people prefer not to invest too much in culture, or at least invest in the kind of culture that does not provoke too much thought." There are also many decision-makers who are not qualified, she says, and, in addition, an ideological dispute is brewing between the conservatives and those who advocate a more open society. And the public — the people this should all be about — is simply forgotten in the process. She says there is no vision for this huge city. For example, there are fourteen cultural centres with performance venues, but no budget, no artistic directors, no real programme, and at the same time the largest theatre in Africa is being built for 1.5 billion euros, with all the frills. It's a kind of show-off strategy — looking good on the outside while entirely neglecting the population's cultural needs. And what is personally important to Dounia in life? "Integrity," she replies. I walk back to the Porte de Marrakech, impressed by her clarity. The rest of the day is devoted to the artists' final presentations, which are being held in rooms of the Hotel Central and La Parallèle.

Sunday, September 25

Quite emotional goodbyes on the rooftop of La Parallèle. Simple and irrefutable statement by Zakarias that still resonates: "Earth is a big place." Packing the mother-ship, getting ready to go.



Monday, September 26

Sofiane has led me to the motorway, slowly leaving Casablanca behind. Relaxed driving towards Tangier. Passing by the plantations again, more people by the road than on the way down. The white birds again; they seem to be herons checking the motorway for potential food.

Crazy hours at customs of the Tangier Med cargo port, almost Kafkaesque. I get a better idea of what Tarek went through on his way south and make it just in time to catch my ferry to Barcelona. Thirty hours across the Mediterranean along the Spanish coast on board the Fantastic, an Italian ship run by Grandi Navi Veloci. Filipino-Italian-Tunisian crew, lots of families with small children aboard — big sleep for me. The next day in the restaurant I meet Victor, a good-humoured man around fifty-five wearing horn-rims.

Originally from Larache, south of Tangier, he has been living in Girona for twenty-five years; he builds tennis courts. He has brought some lamb along with him from the festivities of the Cordero, called Eid al Adha in Arabic, and he invites me to join him. We sit down together in the corner of the dining hall, and he heats up the lamb in a microwave off to the side.

Wednesday morning, September 28

Friendly customs agents in Barcelona. Juan is completing the form for the carnet, when their server crashes — I take advantage of the break to go see Plaça Reial and the Kabul, a hostel where I spent a couple of months about twenty years ago. Same pool table as back then, same odour in the stairway.

Two days of driving northeast, crossing France, then taking the mothership through the lower Alps . . . the green of the trees and bushes is becoming more saturated again, home is getting closer.

Thursday night, September 29

A 36-hour break in Zurich, meeting up with the crew again and spending a few hours with an old friend. A late summer day, a short swim in the lake. At night, listening to Andalus playing African records in a bar. On Saturday, back to Cologne by train; autumn will be putting in an appearance. What a trip this was, so many details, so many new possibilities.