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TransArea Tangier: The city and the literatures of the world

The literatures of the world know no beginning, but multiply their beginnings unceasingly. They possess no origin, but point to numerous (and increasingly more numerous) origins. Thus do the literatures of the world move across the millennia and the languages, they run through extremely varied spaces and cultures, know of the great variety of systems of power, possession, and (colonial, sexual, cultural, or social) dependency. As the sensuous bearers of a discursive knowledge that specializes in not being specialized, they are, in their aesthetic presence, fragile and so very easily destructible, and yet they sometimes speak to us in languages that for a long while have no longer existed, they report on powers that have long since fallen into obscurity, they point to political or military structures whose names we often no longer know. As witnesses of human life, they create life. But above all, they form the future, and not last from out of that which no longer is, and yet cannot cease to be. Present within their presence is that which is not in the present tense. Their knowledge is archipelagic and relational.

The beating heart of the literatures of the world is their living intertextuality, and consequently, the future-building presence of past works in the present text. Homer's songs become productive in Alexandria, Buenos Aires, or Dublin; the Gilgamesh epic continues to be effective in the Bible, or in the songs of a Latin American poet; Aztlán or Quetzalcóatl generate new images of the world in Mexico City, New York, or Paris; the Shijing opens up new songs in China, Japan, Africa, or Germany. After centuries, the writings of the great world-traveler Ibn Battuta, like those of Leo Africanus, are still present in the memory of the literatures of the world, but there is more: again and again, they engender and produce new literary creations wherein current travels open out on other travels and current places open out on a series of earlier places.

On the recent occasion of a transareally-conceived conference in Cologne, I attempted to express an understanding of the city of New Orleans not only as a city in a very specific geocultural space, but as a movement-space that merges a great variety of areas and, ultimately, as a global archipelago in the (carnivalised) city-space (see Ette 2017). In the following series of considerations on the city of Tangier, the opposite path will be taken. It will again be a matter of a city and its surrounding region that are associated with a great number of

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myths. This time, however, the focus lies – put simply – less upon centripetal motions (which of course cannot be absent) but much more upon centrifugal dynamics that connect Tangier to Africa and Europe, and at the same time, to the farthest reaches of China or to the American continents. In the following, Tangier will be understood, not spatio-historically but movement-historically, less as a place than as a transit, less as a city than as a mobility, in order thus to put to the test new possibilities of imagination and thought beyond all territorialization.

Tangier in China

[A]nd so I entered the city, which is ringed by four walls. Between the first and second live the Sultan's servants, who guard the city. Between the second and third one finds the mounted troops and the commander who governs the city. Within the third wall live the Muslims. It was here that I lodged at the house of their Sheik, Zahir ad-Din. Within the fourth wall live the Chinese, who make up the majority of the inhabitants of the city. One day I experienced something astounding. I was a guest at a celebration they held for me, when one of the Muslims' great doctors of the Law entered. They said to him "Welcome, oh Sheik Qiwan ad-Din". During the conversation, something about him aroused my interest, so I took a closer look at him. He then said "Why do you look at me so? Can it be that you know me?" I asked him where he came from, and he replied that he came from Ceuta. "And I come from Tangier", I cried, at which he greeted me anew, and wept. I asked him "Did you also visit India?" And he replied "Yes; I was in the capital, Delhi". I remembered him and said "You are al-Baschiri". (Ibn Battuta 2015: 158)¹

Presented in a literarily complex manner, this scene of a dawning recognition, of a tearful *anagnorisis* in a foreign land, shows two Muslims who come together, each having spent the greater portion of their lives traveling. They both hail from the same region of the Arabic world, not far from the Strait of Gibraltar; they first met, briefly, in India and now get to know one another personally at the eastern end, as it were, of the immense realm of Islamic influence. We find ourselves far away from Maghreb, far from the West, in the great and beautiful city of Qanjanfu, that the first-person narrator, by invitation of the local ruler, has reached after a boat ride on the river. The city, laid out on a plain and surrounded by fertile gardens, is indeed equal to "the oasis of the city of Damascus", but we are in China, in a city that can be identified with the modern city of Jianshan in the

¹ The English translations here follow the German excerpts, which differ in various points from the widely-known English translation by Gibb 1969.

Zhejiang Province (Ibn Battuta 2015: 158)². The traveler, who is received here as a guest by all of the city's top dignitaries even before reaching the gates of the city, is none other than Ibn Battuta, who even today is possibly the most famous Arab traveler of all time.

Ibn Battuta spent long stretches of his life on a journey, the scope and significance of which can probably best be compared to that of the Venetian Marco Polo. In both cases, we are looking at journeys *before* the historical progression of those phases of acceleration that, in their totality, form the long-enduring process of globalization³. But for the first phase of accelerated globalization particularly, the journeys of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta were vitally important to the state of knowledge regarding what would later be called the "Old World": in ways both direct and indirect, Christopher Columbus was to gather much of his information and impressions from these reports as seen in his annotated edition of Marco Polo's journal (Gil 1987). A life of travel, but also a life constantly in search of the most current information possible: according to some accounts, Ibn Battuta, the man from Tangier, had departed from his home city in 1325, not to finally return to the region around modern Morocco until 1353 (Ibn Battuta 2015: 7). This son of Tangier advanced to become the veritable embodiment of the Arab explorer.

Two years later, in 1355, his travel account (which was not only famous in the Orient, but would soon be in the Occident as well), as stated by Ralf Elger, the current editor of his work, was "completed by an Andalusian man of letters named Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Juzayy al-Kalbi, at the behest of the Moroccan Sultan Abu Inan (d. 1358), according to the oral travel accounts of Ibn Battuta" (Ibn Battuta 2015: 7). There began a long reception history of this written and repeatedly edited travel account (a history that cannot be examined in the context of the line of inquiry followed here) in which the traveler, a native of Tangier, was to emerge as the (not uncontested) source and authority of Arab knowledge regarding Asia, Africa, and broad stretches of the southern Mediterranean.

Ibn Battuta, who died in 1368 (or possibly not until 1377, according to some sources), much like his "predecessor" Marco Polo, had presented his account in oral form – though not from inside Genoese prisons – whereupon these narratives were immediately written down and thus preserved for posterity. And like the Venetian traveler, Ibn Battuta also found himself exposed from the start to the tremendous accusation of having simply invented his extensive travels, of never having carried out any of them. But the mistrust leveled at the explorer by those who have remained home is as old as the history of human travel itself. Unlike

² For a chronology of Ibn Battuta's travels see Hrbek 1962.

³ On the different phases of accelerated globalization, see the opening chapter of Ette 2016.

the German saying *Lügen haben kurze Beine* (“Lies have short legs”), the French proverb regarding this mistrust of “travel liars” opens up gates and doors: *A beau mentir qui vient de loin* (“It’s a beautiful lie that comes from afar”, or “long ways, long lies”). But how important is the question of whether Ibn Battuta actually had seen, with his own eyes, everything that he described?

While more or less justified doubts regarding the actual completion of certain parts of the journey, or even of the journey in its entirety – doubts that are supported by a fundamentally improved state of the source material – have presented themselves vigorously time and again, all the way to the present day (Ibn Battuta 2015: 216–240; see also Euben 2006: 63–89), it is still important to consider that we are dealing here (even if it is the case that Ibn Battuta never reached the end of China) with a traveler who depicts, with the greatest vibrancy and clarity, a world with which the Arab region of the 14th century of our reckoning was certainly acquainted, if not familiar. We should by no means apply to this Arabian travel account literary forms and norms of understanding that have their origin in an early-modern tradition of the West and cannot simply be transferred over to non-European literatures. The understanding of “author”, “authorship”, and “authority” is neither transhistorical nor transcultural.

Without a doubt, the journey of Ibn Battuta presents to us the knowledge of an entire epoch regarding the world as it was known to Arab scholars of the day, and at the same time demonstrates for us a world consciousness that, as a consciousness of the great variety of aspects of life throughout the world, is extraordinary for the period, no matter how anchored it may be in the knowledge and reference texts of the time. No one else in the Arab world of the 14th century succeeded like Ibn Battuta, no one else was able to structure and develop the knowledge of his time regarding the political, social, religious, economic, or cultural aspects of the great variety of empires as was the man from Tangier.

It is important to note that the scene he sets for the knowledge of his time is in the form of a journey, of a complex itinerary, for the spaces whose story/-ies he tells can only be delineated and developed from a state of movement. As with Marco Polo, it is thus only of secondary importance whether the traveler has seen with his own eyes everything that his writings report, and whether or not some of the things that – with no less conviction (or persuasiveness) – made it into his travel account might “merely” have reached his ears. The differing epistemological valuation of eye and ear is even historically erratic in the annals of the Occident (Ette 2001: 119–192). We should certainly not indiscriminately apply these neither transhistorical nor transcultural standards to Ibn Battuta’s account, nor should we stylize it into a modern subject in the occidental sense.

But how is the text that carried his name structured in a way that is travel-literary and, accordingly, vectorial? The enormous circular structure that lies at

the basis of the movement-figure of the entire Arab-Asian travel account opens and closes at Tangier; afterwards, it opens again upon the smaller circular figure of the Andalusian journey; then it eventually opens upon the geographically larger circle of the African journey, which closes the journey(s) altogether. As is stated at the beginning of the travel-literary chronicles, transcribed in the 14th century, edited in the 17th century by Muhammad ibn Fath Allah al-Bailuni, and newly translated into German by Ralf Elger in the 21st century:

I left my native city of Tangier in the month of June of the year 1325 to undertake the pilgrimage to the *Protected House of God* and to visit its city, *blessings and peace be upon it*. I had no companion to accompany me, and I attached myself to no caravan. I was driven by a powerful impulse. The longing for those exalted places lay deep within me. I was at that time twenty-two years old. (Ibn Battuta 2015: 16)

Life and journey are brought together here in an intensive, even intimate and mutually involved interrelation. At the same time, this report of the most extraordinary fourteenth-century journey ever to have had an account handed down to us begins very much in the classic manner: with the holy pilgrimage to the sacred places of Islam, with the hajj, whereby the entire journey is opened (while at the end, through another pilgrimage to Mecca, it is once again closed). It is not without reason that the entire journey is thus placed under the protection of Allah and his Prophet Mohammad, a godly transcendence that is repeatedly brought up and called to memory in the travel account. In this sense, it is all about a holy, even God-ordained journey.

Tangier thus becomes the point of departure for a journey that, through desire and longing, is taken far beyond Mecca and Medina. Tangier stands simultaneously as a beginning and as an origin, which throughout the journey – as we have seen – are kept always in the consciousness of the reader. The longer the (life-) journey of the twenty-two year old at the beginning of the account lasts, the more Tangier becomes the myth of both an origin and of a future that will (certainly not only in the economic sense) open up upon his return. For the travel report itself is directed to the local sovereign in hopes of garnering possible support for the author, support that might bestow upon the traveler returning to his homeland, and insure to him in his old age – Ibn Battuta is, by this point, over fifty years old – a life free from care. Had not the traveler and scholar accomplished great things for the overall state of knowledge in the Islamic world of his time?

Already apparent in the description of entering the city of Qanjanfu, the modern Jianshan, is the precise descriptive technique of Ibn Battuta, who consistently integrates the maximum amount of regional, cultural, economic, or sociopolitical information into the traveler's movements, couched in the form of the travel account. The fact that these details and this information by no means

rely solely on, or can only be traced back to, what has been seen, but also to what has been heard or read, has been worked out in many instances, given that Ibn Battuta was clearly a well-schooled reader of not only Arabic sources, but of European-Christian ones as well, which include, among others, the great travel account of Marco Polo.

For this devout Muslim, whose judgments of all other confessions and faiths run from pejorative to deprecating, and not infrequently even to hostile, the question of convivence, of the forms and norms for living together amid different religions or even different denominations within Islam plays a decisive role. Certainly in China, but also in India and other countries on his travel itinerary, he deals time and again and in great detail with the living and working conditions of his brothers in faith in their interactions with other religious communities.

It is thus not surprising that in Qanjanfu, he precisely observes where the Muslims reside, who their political and religious representatives are, and what importance the Islamic communities have acquired in any given city or region. He thus provides us with the basic data of a convivence of cultures that – as the many travel experiences and interwoven narratives show – are always perceived to be precarious. Without a specific *ZusammenLebensWissen* (“knowledge for living together”) (Ette 2010) a coexistence in peace and diversity can hardly be organized – and this is especially apparent in the islamocentric depictive forms of Ibn Battuta. The travel account of the learned Arab certainly contributed richly to such a knowledge for coexistence.

At this point, let us return again to the city of Qanjanfu. After the traveler has provided information on the fortifications and the number of guards, and has spent the night in the house of the commander in the first district of the city, there follows information that is crucial to coexistence with regard to the structure of this city divided into six parts:

In the second district of the city live the Jews, the Christians, and the sun-worshipping Turks, of whom great numbers live here. Their governor is Chinese. I slept for one night in his house.

In the third district of the city, the most beautiful of all, live the Muslims. The markets there are set up in the Muslim fashion. There are many merchants who possess great fortunes. I stayed in the house of the family of Uthman ibn Affan al-Misri, an important merchant who has settled there, as the city was pleasing to him. (Ibn Battuta 2015: 159)

Again and again it is the military, political, religious, or business elites with whom Ibn Battuta seeks the closest contact: they impart to him a specific knowledge for dominance and a great deal of concrete information that make their way in one form or another into the travel account. Even if it is a world-view centered in the

Arab world and oriented toward Muslim forms and especially Muslim norms of living that is to be read in the travel account, it is still apparent how complex are the societies of the time that are visited by the scholar from Tangier, and, insofar as his explorations go, from what diverse population groups they are composed.

All the while – as we see but a few pages before the visit to the great Chinese city – he continually invokes the assistance of heavenly powers which signal for him, as an orthodox Muslim, the help of Allah in all of his undertakings, even, among other things, in the person of a sheik who is supposedly over two hundred years old (Ibn Battuta 2015: 156). From this perspective, the life's journey of Ibn Battuta proves to be an endlessly expanded pilgrimage, the goal of which is not only the holy places, but the whole world of a generous God who protects the traveler, even as far as the (Islamic) ends of China. Convivence in this world is therefore developed, in a manner pleasing to God, from the perspective of a transcendence anchored in Islam. It is also from here that the writer's strictness of belief and custom that is so frequently emphasized in the text arises, and the writer appears not infrequently as one who offers the exhortation to return to the true teachings of the Prophet. From the outermost West to the outermost East and back again, Ibn Battuta traverses the knowledge of his time in not only the spatial sense.

The return journey of Ibn Battuta, after completing a second pilgrimage to the holy places of Islam by way of Alexandria and the island of Djerba, leads back to his homeland, a movement figure of circular construction to which is connected the traveler's hypertrophic praise of his sovereign, who possesses all at once for Ibn Battuta all of the virtues and qualities of the rulers whose regions he has visited, and who (as through a magnifying lens) vastly surpasses all other kings, caliphs, and emperors in greatness and significance. In direct connection to this is the praise of the homeland, which is said to be so beautiful that – as Ibn Battuta puts it, employing the verse of the poet Uthman ibn Darwish – even the celestial bodies begin and end their journeys here: “The sun wanders thereto, and the half-moons depart thence upon their journey” (Ibn Battuta 2015: 168). Tangier is a place of movement. In this lyrically-based projection of his earthly travel movements into heavenly ones, the traveler pays homage, with the help of poetry, to his Maghreb, that is, to that West in which the sun over the Arab world shines the longest before sinking into the sea. Thus does the widely-traveled man of Tangier, who embodies the knowledge of his time, bow at the end of his journey before his sovereign, his origins, and his homeland all at once.

But with the return from Fez, “where I [laid down] my walking-staff”, to Tangier, where the first-person narrator visits the “grave of my father”, the circle of the journey – as already indicated – opens up a second time (Ibn Battuta 2015: 168). For the traveler moves farther on to Ceuta – which certainly was woven into his contemplations with reflection on the eastern end of the world – in order, as a good

Muslim, to take part in the jihad, the “Holy War” against the infidels, the Christians (Ibn Battuta 2015: 168). Tangier and Ceuta had long since become cities directly behind the front.

And thus does Ibn Battuta, before the backdrop of the “Holy War”, display the landscape of his region of origin on both sides of the strait. From one of the Pillars of Hercules, the other becomes visible, the “Jabel Tariq”, in whose name are celebrated the glorious conquest of the year 711 by the military leader Tariq and the subsequent Arab expansion over the entire Iberian Peninsula (Ibn Battuta 2015: 168). Over and over in the presence of Ibn Battuta, “the accursed enemy” must be combated and forced to scatter (Ibn Battuta 2015). Still standing is the Kingdom of Granada, capital of al-Andalus, whose beauty, with its fortifications and palaces as well as its gardens and environs, is said to be “unmatched” and is lyrically sung in the words of many poets (Ibn Battuta 2015: 168). Along with the city of Tangier, Ceuta and Gibraltar stand for that world that we can address as the home region of Ibn Battuta: a home region that, for him, was clearly unimaginable without the Maghreb’s opposite coast to the north, without the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada.

The path he took after the end of his participation in the “Holy War” against the Christians and which led back across the Strait of Gibraltar does not signal Ibn Battuta’s final return home, as there now opens before the traveler the great caravan track across the Sahara in Sub-Saharan Africa that crosses Mali and reaches the road from Timbuktu, to be left once again on a route lying farther to the east. There follows a long stay in these far reaches of Africa which are, however, traditionally well-connected to the northern part of the continent. Finally, Ibn Battuta is called to the court by his sovereign in 1353, so that he must immediately depart, via the “land of Hoggar”, to Fez, “the residential city of the ruler of the faithful”, in order to reach the court, by the shortest route, within the year (Ibn Battuta 2015: 178). The great journey of the man from Tangier thus comes to its end.

During his decades-long journey, which is time and again interrupted by various tasks and offices for a number of different rulers, the traveler by no means only collected information that he wished in the end to present to his local sovereign and, in written form, to a later reading public. Much more, the trade in information is already of greatest importance to the learned Arab during the journey, since he has at his disposal valuable knowledge for which he allows himself to be well paid. As it says, for instance, on the way to the “Far East” at the end of his trip through the land of the “Golden Horde”, after a visit to Byzantium, Ibn Battuta specifically sought out, as he traveled on, a sultan in his residential city: “When I arrived, the sultan asked me about my trip to Constantinople and about its ruler. I gave him the desired information, and he compensated me, as was the custom, for the travel costs” (Ibn Battuta 2015: 70).

In this way, the travel route establishes connections between different regions, different cultures, and sometimes between kingdoms that are occasionally friendly but most often hostile to one another, for whom the traveler becomes a trader in information and thus a procurer of knowledge who is to be well paid. These important detours become “mini-routes”, *routines*, as it were, that are important to Ibn Battuta’s survival, if in this way he can, time and again, secure new funding and ensure his further travels. The man from Tangier thus becomes a traveling salesman in pieces of information, which are constantly exchanged over the entire course of the itinerary. Should some rulers, as in Sub-Saharan Africa for instance, attempt to not pay him for his information, he makes concrete demands on them and depicts them negatively in his account. Knowledge is power, but also good money.

Of great importance especially to distant journeying is the use of preexisting travel connections. Often, the routes in Asia and in Africa, much like the pilgrims’ routes to Mecca and Medina, are predetermined. Travelers there follow those routes and paths that so many others have traveled before them. It is thus no real surprise that in China, in a big city in which are settled representatives of the greatest possible variety of faiths, a man from Tangier and a man from Ceuta should meet, thereby creating a connection between the Silk Road and the Strait of Gibraltar. Anyone from Tangier or Ceuta knows of the great value of the information that circulates along the paths of communication, the routes on land or water. For by the time of Ibn Battuta, the Strait of Gibraltar had been bundling together for millennia all of those streams of knowledge that connected the East to the West and the South to the North. Tangier and Ceuta, which had always lain at the intersection of these routes, were and are in this sense centered on transit. In this multiconnectivity since times long past lies a good portion of their mythical capital. Only that which provokes wide discussion can grow into myth.

Thus Tangier, above all else, is this: a city at the point of intersection of streams of knowledge that transform the city at the entrance to the Mediterranean into a movement-space of a great variety of dynamics. In this sense, Tangier is less a city than a transit-space for the interchange of not only goods and merchandise, of travelers and refugees, but also of those forms and norms of a knowledge for living that has for long centuries and millennia developed and conjoined here in a very particular way. It is no coincidence that the most famous traveler and travel writer of the Arab world, who knew well the value of knowledge and who forged his way to the outermost borders of the world that was at that time known to the Orient, should come from Tangier. For Tangier, more than virtually any other city, stands at the points of intersection of transcontinental movements old and new, and indeed, stands for movement itself, for the transit of knowledge and its vectoricity. In its history and its myth, Tangier is not territorial, but vectorial: Tangier is transit.

Tangier between Africa and Europe

Tingis, or Tangier, founded by Carthaginians on the western entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar in the fifth century before our current reckoning, has three-quarters of a million inhabitants today. In Greek mythology, it is connected to the place where Hercules split the Earth and where, according to Pindar, the so-called “Pillars of Heracles” (in geographical terms, the promontories of Calpe and Abila – today known as Gibraltar and Djebel Musa) signaled the end of the habitable world: *Non plus ultra*. The eventful history of this city on the edge of the habitable world is a history of continual changes of power, of which but a few, judging from subsequent observations, are ever brought to mind. Possessed by the Arabs since the year 702, that is, a short decade before the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, the city repeatedly changed possessors during the *Reconquista*, coming to the Portuguese in 1471, to the Spanish in 1580, and to the British in 1661, before it fell once again to the Alawites in 1684⁴ Proceeding from Tangier, one could easily write a history of transmediterranean relations⁵.

Another writer who undoubtedly belongs in this transmediterranean tension field is the author of a history of Africa that, since its publication in Italian in the middle of the 16th century, stood as the Europeans’ most important source of knowledge about Africa up to the time of Mungo Park. Its writer was none other than the man who went down in the history books and encyclopedias of the world as Giovan Leone Affricano or Leo Africanus, who was born in Granada as al-Hassan ben Mohammed ben Ahmed al-Wazzan al-Gharnati al-Fassi, probably between December of 1494 and August of 1495, that is, shortly after the conquest of the capital city of the Nasrid Kingdom in Moorish Granada in 1492⁶. His full Arabic name contains not only the recognizable references to different places where the Granadian lived, it is also supplemented with the Christian baptismal name that was bestowed upon the later-to-be author of the *Descrittione dell’ Africa* by Pope Leo X on the sixth of January, 1520 – that is, on the anniversary of the taking of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs. No wonder then, that the man with many names would early on be described as a wanderer between worlds or as a nomad between

⁴ Regarding the history of the city of Tangier, see, among others, Elbl 2007/2013, Brini 1996, and Rickmeyer 2009.

⁵ See Hofmann/Messling 2015.

⁶ It should also be noted that al-Wazzan’s French editor and translator Alexis Epaulard proceeds from a possible birth date of 1489. See Rauchenberger 1999: 11, 35; and Redouane 1999: 78.

cultures (Davis 2006), and would take his place among the most fascinating figures of the early 16th century.

Al-Hassan al-Wazzan's description of the city of Cairo, which he knew from extended stays there, is at once tailored to at least a double readership, both occidental and oriental, and begins – as is so often the case with this author – with elaborations on the linguistic origins of the name, and eloquently depicts the splendor of its layout and the abundance of the wares and luxury items amassed within its walls. Leo Africanus saw with his own eyes the splendor of the city on the Nile, but he also saw the downfall of Cairo when it was conquered by the Turkish troops of Sultan Selim. In his account of the rich markets of the great city and all of its products gathered from distant lands, the abundance of a world of transcontinental trade once more arises whose sometimes millennia-old trade routes crossed one another in hubs like Cairo, Fez, or Constantinople, but certainly also in Tangier, a place with which Leo Africanus was certainly very familiar. With a highly systematic approach and an impressive wealth of details, the Granadian writer sketches the world-consciousness of an Old World at a point in time when the new seaways and sea powers in the West had for some time been creating new rules of play and new poles of power. The world that Giovan Leone describes is a world that soon would no longer exist in its present form – and not only because of the ever more oppressive Turkish hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean.

With his knowledgeable depiction of Cairo, by means of the goods and their places of origin in the realm of the intersection of the Orient and Occident, of Africa, Asia, and Europe, a space is conjured in which the different peoples and cultures seem to associate peacefully – and thus, multiculturally and interculturally – by and with one another. Within this Old World diegesis, drawn up in the fashion of travel literature, a world is evoked whose violence the author, having been driven out of Granada with his family, undoubtedly knew well, but which he traversed many times, not only in the transmediterranean realm within the tension-field between the Orient and the Occident, but also in the far-flung regions in the African interior. More than perhaps any other Arab traveler, he was familiar with every inner space of the African continent, of which the Portuguese and the Spanish, as well as the entirety of Christian Europe, possessed only the dimmest notions. Setting aside all of the seafarers, monks, bureaucrats, bishops, soldiers and merchants who reached the New World during this time, there can be but very few travelers of the early 16th century who achieved the level of experience and knowledge of the cosmopolitan Johannes Leo Africanus. But what do we know of this man and the genesis of his writings?

If one follows the history of the editions of *Descrittione dell' Africa*⁷ the current state of research indicates convincingly that al-Wazzan's text, made famous by Giovanni Battista Ramusio, was written and completed between 1524 and 1526. Not only the context of the publication in Ramusio's esteemed collection in the 1550s, but also the context of the first appearance of the *Description of Africa* a quarter-century earlier places the immediate context of the journeys and the writings of Joannes Leo Africanus close to the first phase of accelerated globalization. Still more: his account is also a component of the wave of westward expansion, to the power and diffusion of which he bore direct or indirect witness.

Since 1986, the publication year of the highly accomplished and successful first novel *Léon l'Africain* by the Lebanese-born writer Amin Maalouf, a much more comprehensive and penetrating discussion of the Moorish Andalusia has been possible (Ette 2010: Chapter 3). Perhaps the best examples to mention here would be the 1991 work of the Moroccan Oumelbanine Zhiri (Zhiri 1991/1995), which examines the centuries-long effect of the printed works of al-Wazzan on the European image of Africa; the book *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* by Princeton researcher Natalie Zemon Davis (Davis 2006) which is culture-theoretically interesting, though compromised by some technical errors; and above all, the comprehensive biographical and editorial examination by the career officer and diplomat Dietrich Rauchenberger (1999).

Rauchenberger's research particularly has provided us a much more precise familiarity with al-Hassan al-Wazzan's travels into the African interior. Put forth here is not only a look into an imaginary map of how Joannes Leo Africanus would have imagined the continent of Africa and its outlines at the time of the writing of the *Descriptions* (Rauchenberger 1999: 195). In a general itinerary map, the long-familiar or directly deducible routes of the far-reaching journeys in the Sahara region are brought together such that it becomes recognizable just what enormous areas of the continent were covered by the multilingual writer, on foot or on the back of a camel, starting out from an area that lies, as it were, around Tangier and Fez and between Africa and Europe.

Admittedly, the first of his extended journeys took al-Hassan in 1507 and 1508 to Constantinople, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Persia, and Tartary (Schubarth-Engelschall 1984: 7–18). He then undertook his second journey around 1510 in the company of his uncle, across the Sahara to Timbuktu, where his relative had been sent on a diplomatic mission for the Moroccan sultan. The third journey, probably between 1512 and 1514, first brought him (again on a trans-Sahara route)

7 Regarding translations and the body of research, long influenced by French scholars, see, for example, Rauchenberger 1999: 153–155; Massignon 1906; and Epaulard 1956.

to Timbuktu, but then proceeded through the Hausa states and the area around Lake Chad, then farther east to Egypt. The fourth and last of his great journeys finally led al-Hassan al-Wazzan once again, at the age of no more than twenty-five, into the north of Africa, to that region that we today, from a Eurocentric perspective, like to call the Near East.

From Egypt, the devout Muslim joined a pilgrimage to Mecca and then started home again. But he was never to reach Fez again. Assumedly during a side-trip to the Mediterranean island of Djerba, he was captured by Christian corsairs under the leadership of Pedro de Bobadilla and abducted as a slave to Italy. There he was made a living present (a custom by no means unusual at the time) to Pope Leo X, who is known for holding court in a manner that was both extravagant and supportive of the arts. This was the point at which the Granadian was turned into the African and again integrated the area around Fez and Tangier into a transmediterranean network of knowledge.

It was the same Leo X who came forth as a friend and patron of the sciences and the arts and who, as the great Renaissance Pope, imposed the sentence of anathema on Martin Luther and launched the famous heresy trial. But this Medici Pope very openly met the Muslim al-Hassan al-Wazzan: he recognized in him a young scholar, learned in matters both worldly and religious, to whom he happily allowed all possibilities for further education in his noble prison, the Castel Sant'Angelo, such that Leo might, if possible, be assured of his knowledge and convert him to Christianity. The interests in the matter were clear. We know from several diplomatic and other records that the "conversion" of al-Hassan al-Wazzan, follower of the prophet Mohammed, and his baptism at the Holy See to Giovan Leone was an international event, much-discussed in many parts of Christendom, an event that stood very much at the center of the high-tension power-struggle between the Orient and the Occident.

In this variation of the East-West conflict, an enduring interest in (the knowledge of) the other was very much in play. Thus the young man from Granada, who found himself once again on the north side of the Mediterranean, very quickly moved into the position of facilitator and translator between the occidental and oriental worlds. In 1524, Joannes Leo Africanus, who stood under the personal protection of "his" Pope, wrote as a contributor, among other things, an Arabic/Hebrew/Latin/Spanish vocabulary list, and in connection with this, wrote his *Description of Africa* in Italian, which earned him, as an informed source of a knowledge of the nearby yet largely unknown continent, the sobriquet "Africanus". For good reason, he wrote and dictated his *Descrizione dell' Affrica e delle cose notabili che quivi sono* not in his mother-tongue, but in that idiom in which he had been instructed from the beginning in Rome: the transcultural dimension of his life's path connects in the most natural way with the translingual

composition of his major work. And this major work, still full of life for a modern reading public, has given rise to a rich literary succession.

As a Muslim born in Granada, al-Hassan al-Wazzan was no doubt in variously close contact with Arabic and its variants, with Berber, with Spanish, and with the wide variety of mixed forms that have grown up between all of these languages. On his extended journeys, he had become familiar with a multitude of African languages before he came to be instructed in Latin and Italian at Castel Sant'Angelo in Papal Rome, and began to read books and writings in these "occidental" languages. As a polyglot scholar and reader, he was thus highly sensitized to all forms of inter- and translingual language phenomena, to asymmetric language contacts and the wide variety of translational problematics alike. It seems quickly to have become clear to him that his opportunity lay in this equally translingual and transcultural competency.

Consequently, continual reflections on language run through his entire body of work. In his *Descrizione* therefore, it is not only about the geographical and topographical frontiers of Africa, its climate and land, vegetation and crops, its great rivers and the animals characteristic of the continent, or the different peoples and their trade goods. It is also about differentiated cultural characteristics that are, above all, noted and examined from a linguistic perspective. Thus it is that in "all African landscapes extending from the Mediterranean to the Atlas Mountains [...] a corrupted Arabic is spoken", whereas only "in the Kingdom of Morocco and in Numidia [...] Berber is more widespread" (Leo Africanus in Schubarth-Engelschall 1984: 72). "The Arab historians", Giovan Leone continues, maintain "emphatically that the Africans have had no other script than the one with Latin characters"; they had indeed spoken other languages, but they "had used Latin letters, as do the Germans in Europe" (Leo Africanus in Schubarth-Engelschall 1984: 72). And he remarks, in a manner thoroughly critical of the source, that without exception, all "of the history books about the Africans that the Arabs possess" are translations from the Latin, "old works written in the times of the Arians, some still earlier" (Leo Africanus in Schubarth-Engelschall 1984: 72).

The degree to which Joannes Leo Africanus had to deal with the effects of globalization from a transmediterranean point of view that oscillated between Africa and Europe is shown by his depictions of the pandemic spread of the syphilis that had been brought back from America. In the forms of reporting and in the (mostly transitory) norms of coexistence brought on by spread of the epidemic, there is much in his case that can be connected to the forms and norms that arose in reaction to epidemics and pandemics as fundamental symptoms and fears of globalization in the second, third, and fourth phases of accelerated globalization. To this extent, the *Description of Africa* delivers not only a fascinating contemporary view into the problematics of a globalization that in the Old World – we need

only think of the quickly occurring biopolitics of the transport of Black slaves to the New World – certainly did not come to a halt at the African continent. At the same time, this work from the middle of the 1520s illustrates for us by literary means how forms and norms of living in a great variety of areas began to change in association with the first phase of accelerated globalization. While on one end of the world the advancing Turks would soon manage to control all terrestrial trade connections between Asia and Europe, the Iberian powers on the other end of the world also established their dominance, especially over the countries of the spice trade. Within a few decades, it was a different world.

Far beyond his time during the first phase of accelerated globalization, a fact that still fascinates about the figure of Léon l'Africain is that, in his translingual activity as a writer between Europe, Africa, and Asia, he was able to develop a form of *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben*, of “Writing-Between-Worlds” that we, from the perspective of the currently waning fourth phase of accelerated globalization and thanks to the reconstruction of specific historical contexts, are indeed able to grasp more precisely and sensitively than in other, less *bewegte* (“moving/turbulent”), less *velociferische* (“devilishly-fast”) times. From the necessity of being able to exchange continents and languages, cultures and religions in order to survive, al-Hassan al-Wazzan, alias Joannes Leo Africanus, developed the transcultural virtue of producing, between the South and the North, between the East and the West, a work of translation that criss-crossed different cultures and forms of expression, a work that makes of him one of the most dazzling and seminal figures of the first phase of accelerated globalization. For his *Descrizione dell' Affrica* is far more than a mere description of Africa: it models, by the means of literature and from a transareal perspective between Granada and Fez, Rom and Tangier, the complexity of the Old in the light of a dawning New World.

Paris in Tangier

As a primarily symbolic bone of contention between the colonialistically oriented European powers at the turn of the 20th century, Tangier was declared in 1923 an “international zone” and collectively governed by France, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, the Soviet Union, and (from 1928) Italy. Thus Tangier, as a highly internationalized city, took up its oldest traditions as a place of transit, but also as a city on a wide variety of (geographical, cultural, political) borders. During the Second World War, Tangier became, primarily in conjunction with the international port of Casa Blanca, the intersection of a number of streams of refugees seeking transatlantic escape routes. The foundations of the elevation of Tangier to a much-desired destination of writers, mostly European and US American, in the

1940s and 50s, and then again in the 60s and 70s depended upon all of these conditions; in association with freedom and liberties, Tangier had long since become (and not only for the West) a literary myth and a myth of literature.

But we are not occupied here with that oft-depicted Tangier of Paul and Jane Bowles, of Jack Kerouac or Tennessee Williams, of Truman Capote or William S. Burroughs⁸. In the following, instead of an expansive analysis of the literature associated with Tangier, an illustrative effort will be made, by means of two further instances, to understand the history and the myth of Tangier in the sense of a vectoricity such as can very well be extrapolated from Ibn Battuta on. It is, consequently, a matter of Tangier Transit – and with it, a matter of the question that asks in which vectorial paths and passages an archaic place, a mythical place, a literary place can be conceived of in motion from motion, and as motion – thereby also impressively showing us how we might, in the place of an ever-territorializing spatial history, set a motion-history that allows us to develop not only logics of the mobile, but also mobile, multilogical logics that are not bound to static frames of reference.

Our second example then, begins in a bar, and thus, a place of passage where constant coming and going reigns. If we were to attempt to describe a bar only with a spatial orientation, architectonically, as it were, then we would understand nothing about this specific bar, or anything of the life around a bar. Let us imagine, then, a man who sits on a barstool and closes his eyes:

One evening, half asleep on a banquette in a bar, just for fun I tried to enumerate all the languages within earshot: music, conversations, the sounds of chairs, glasses, a whole stereophony of which a square in Tangiers (as described by Severo Sarduy) is the exemplary site. That too spoke within me, and this so-called “interior” speech was very like the noise of the square, like that amassing of minor voices coming to me from the outside: I myself was a public square, a *sook*; through me passed words, tiny syntagms, bits of formulae, and *no sentence formed*, as though that were the law of such a language. This speech, at once very cultural and very savage, was above all lexical, sporadic; it set up in me, through its apparent flow, a definitive discontinuity. (Barthes 1975: 49)⁹

⁸ See the overview in Coury/Lacey 2009.

⁹ “Un soir, à moitié endormi sur une banquette de bar, j’essayais par jeu de dénombrer tous les langages qui entraient dans mon écoute: musiques, conversations, bruits de chaises, de verres, toute une stéréophonie dont une place de Tanger (décrite par Severo Sarduy) est le lieu exemplaire. En moi aussi cela parlait (c’est bien connu), et cette parole dite ‘intérieure’ ressemblait beaucoup au bruit de la place; à cet échelonnement de petites voix qui me venaient de l’extérieur: j’étais moi-même un lieu public, un *sook*; en moi passaient les mots, les menus syntagmes, les bouts de formules, et aucune phrase ne se formait, comme si c’eût été la loi de ce langage-là. Cette parole à la fois très culturelle et très sauvage était surtout lexicale, sporadique; elle constituait en moi, à travers son flux apparent, un discontinu définitif” (Barthes 2002 : 249).

Which “definitive discontinuity” is being discussed here? At first glance, this opening passage is dealing with Figure 33 (“Phrase”) of *Le Plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*, 1973), regarding a thoroughly mundane scene, indeed, a scene of boredom, of *ennui*, that becomes the starting point of a game that the first-person narrator plays with himself. And yet, in this now famous text by the French semiotician, writer, and philosopher Roland Barthes, as he closes his eyes and concentrates on his ears, there emerges, playfully as it were, a landscape, or more exactly, a soundscape in which a wide variety of languages, sounds, or snatches of music come together in the auditory sense – and thus (as we could say along with Jean-Luc Nancy) in an “inside” and an “outside” simultaneously¹⁰. The contingency of this soundscape is intended: it is not a matter here of a scientific examination by the French semiotician and semiologist, but rather a reflection on the search, both culture-theoretical and life-science-related, for the formulation of an aesthetics of pleasure.

In the inner-sight of the first person narrator, an outer-sight of the then already famous Parisian intellectual becomes both visible and audible. Nevertheless, we should not mistake this “I” for the text-external travel writer Roland Barthes. In this first of the three microtexts that form the figure “Phrase” or “Sentence”, an anecdote from Tangier is related, a biographeme that refers to Barthes’ frequent trips to Morocco – often in the company of other intellectuals and writers such as Michel Foucault, François Wahl, or Severo Sarduy – and specifically to Tangier.

The experimental protocol that this “I” carries out is similar to that of the “echo chamber” that Barthes would describe so impressively under the title “La Chambre d’échos” in his experimental autobiography *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* two years later (Barthes 1993–1994: 151). In the ears of the first-person narrator, a stereophonic soundscape emerges such as Barthes will again take up in an eroticizing manner in the last figure of *The Pleasure of the Text*, and which he will relate within the concept of stereophony to an aesthetics of pleasure to be created later.

But the added reference in parentheses to a text by Barthes’ friend, the Cuban writer Severo Sarduy, makes it clear that Barthes’ short text is superimposed, as it were, over a text by Sarduy that had been published in 1971, in a special edition dedicated to Barthes, in the magazine *Tel Quel* under the simple title “Tanger”. But in this text, originally composed in Spanish and translated

10 On this tension, in a work heavily influenced by Roland Barthes, see Nancy (2010): 20–31.

by Philippe Sollers and Severo Sarduy into French, we collide, in an intertextual game of hide-and-seek, with the very term named by Barthes:

STEREOPHONY: The ground is steep; the square in the act of hearing (*à l'écoute*) about two cities: voices that cancel one another out – ever-present, the voice of Oum Kalsoum. Leather slippers over the smooth stones. Soprano voices of the Quran school. The little spoon against the green leaves, in the tea-glass. The “other” languages, spoken in a harsh voice by an Andalusian mountain dweller, “mouth” for “ear”, “nose” for “mouth”. *Stéréographie*: on the tattered signs – remnants of Latin typography – Arabic characters, dripping down, drawn in tar, the night. *Stripes*: wide: Djellabas of linen; moving. (Sarduy 1971: 87)¹¹

In a few lines, in a compressed manner that frees itself from the sentence as organizing principle, a cityscape of Tangier is built from sounds that now reach us, in fact, in a stereophony: from the text by Sarduy and the text by Barthes alike which, one might say, present themselves to be heard alternately in an intertextual *stereography* that puts forth Tangier as a city of different cultures, different languages, different forms of living to be heard and seen. It is the attempt at a radically vocal openness of writing: even a short text by François Wahl posthumously joins in, written in association with death, a text that appends itself intertextually to Sarduy from off-stage as it were, as it refers to the glass of tea in Tangier in a backward glance that in 1993 bears witness to the long-ago deaths of friends (Wahl 1993: 32). The sound of a little spoon hitting the green leaves in the tea-glass: it ties together the search for lost time in the texts of Barthes, Sarduy, and Wahl as a sensuous sign, like the Madeleine dunked in tea in Marcel Proust's *Recherche* that had become, for Roland Barthes particularly, the obsession of a literary *écriture* of his own.

An additional stereophony thus arises, on a different, intertextual level: one text calls to another, one text answers the other, and all meet in a public square in Tangier that, in *The Pleasure of the Text* is transferred into a bar and, at the same time, transforms the inner space of the first-person narrator into an echo chamber. Is it a coincidence that the name Barthes starts with the same letters? A coincidence, that in the lexeme “bar”, an echo of the name can be heard? The inner speech of the “I” is similar to the sounds; it forms a “rustling of language”, as Barthes described it in 1975 in his text of the same title, *Le bruissement de la*

11 “Le sol est incliné ; la place à l'écoute des deux villes : voix qui s'annulent – toujours présente, celle d'Oum Kalsoum. Babouches sur les pierres lisses. Sopranos de l'école coranique. La petite cuiller contre les feuilles vertes, dans le verre de thé. Les langues ‘autres’, parlées d'une voix rauque, de montagnard andalou ; ‘bouche’ pour ‘oreille’, ‘nez’ pour ‘bouche’. Stéréographie : sur les affiches lacérées – restes de typographie latine –, des caractères arabes dégoulinants, tracés au goudron, la nuit. Raies : larges : djellabas de lin ; mouvantes”. A strongly divergent Spanish version of this text can be found in Sarduy 1992.

langue. “The rustling” it says, “is the sound of that which runs well” (Barthes 1993–1994: 274). Parisian intellectuals in a public square, in a café, in a bar in Tangier: Tangier appears in the rustling of *languages*, in which the echo of distant stereophonies, distant stereographies becomes audible and present.

From the very first line, Sarduy’s text opens upon a dialog between the many languages that shall remain untranslated here: “El Zoco Chico, le Petit Socco, place de la Medina, à Tanger; Roland Barthes y a reconnu le ‘lieu de l’écriture’. / Tracer ses coordonnées. Relever sa topologie symbolique” (Sarduy 1971: 86). Naturally, in the intertextual play of symbolic topologies, Sarduy cannot leave out a reference to *Tangier* by William S. Burroughs. It is a world of mutual references and reverences, deeply submerged in that baroque and rococo that in Sarduy’s neo-baroque style pours forth ever-new circles, ellipses, and volutes – not without the Cuban’s usual brilliant mockery: “Mihrab of Bakelite: Mozarabic kitsch” (Sarduy 1971: 86–87).

That Barthes seeks in *Le Plaisir du texte*, much like Sarduy in “Tanger”, not only to do away with the sentence as the foundation for linguists but also as the basis of all narrative, cannot be pursued and explicated any further here¹². Of much greater importance to our present considerations is the fact that in the figure called “Phrase”, the voices from outside and the voices from within form a public square, such that the “I”, in a manner of speaking, becomes a public place, a “souk”¹³ just like the one in Tangier, and thereby becomes a place of passage himself. But the shreds, splinters, and fragments do not build a sentence; they refuse – as in Sarduy’s stereophonic passage – to bend to the law of sentence structure; they recognize a different law that renounces the sentence and forms a *fractal* writing. The sporadic and thus insular character of this language gives rise to a discontinuity such as Barthes time and again microtextually inserts in this figure (and in many other figures); Tangier itself becomes a “place of writing” (*lieu de l’écriture*) and transforms itself in these short texts into a fractal: in the *modèle réduit* of a whole world that, through the ear, reaches the echo chamber of the “I” and finds there its many-voiced, multilingual resonance.

Thus, just as Severo Sarduy let it be heard with a look to Roland Barthes at the beginning of “Tanger”, everything becomes a souk, a marketplace of languages, of the relentless circulation of the sensuous, the senses, and the sense – at least, when this sense (*Sens in French*) is thought of as sense and direction in the plural. And so are Sarduy’s “Tanger” and Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text* joined by a travel-literary volume that Barthes withheld until his death in 1980, and in which Tangier becomes the actual point of reference. It is not surprising that everything

¹² C.f. (extensively) commentary in Barthes, Roland/Ette, Ottmar 2010: 325–333.

¹³ For a view from another perspective, see Landmann 2003: 129–132.

begins with the (sound-)figure of a barman who lovingly places a red geranium bloom into a water-glass in a grimy railroad station pub (Barthes 1987: 23).

Not published until after his death, Barthes' *Incidents*, according to the book's first editor François Wahl, contains "things seen and heard in Morocco" – all of that which was recorded "primarily in Tangier and Rabat, and subsequently in the South" in the years 1968 and 1969 (Barthes 1987: 8). As was already the case with Severo Sarduy, many of the scenes with Barthes are set in the area around the Petit Socco, where those mostly foreign writers who turned Tangier into a myth of the West once lived. But there, where the Roman forum of Tingis was once located, everything had long been dilapidated, though certainly without having forgotten the great days of Tangier, as is again and again carefully recorded and preserved in these Moroccan *Incidents*.

And yet the short and ultra-short texts based here give witness to a fascination that the place must have exerted upon the narrator, but certainly also on Barthes. This mythical place in the history of Tangier is thus, from the first page on, the setting for that which is not conceivable with simple logic:

In the square in front of the Socco, his blue shirttails flying, an emblem of Disorder, a furious boy (which in this country means a boy with all the features of madness) gesticulates and rails at a European (Go home!). Then vanishes. A few seconds later, the sound of chanting indicates the approach of a funeral; the procession appears. Among the bearers (in relays) of the coffin, the same boy, temporarily subdued. (Barthes 1992: 13)¹⁴

The minor incident in the square refers first of all to the tensions between "Native" and "European", but at the same time draws attention to the functioning of an at least double logic. But this is not so much a mere matter of the construction of an immediately referentializable extralingual reality, but rather, of a textuality that, very much in the sense of the text-theory of *Tel Quel*, is directed toward the liberation of the significant from the pressure of Mimesis, and perhaps even more, in the sense of *The Pleasure of the Text*, is directed toward undermining the all-regulating *sentence*. Tangier is again and again explicitly named in the microtexts and micronarratives, yet this Tangier functions like an experimental protocol, like a laboratory in which ever-new *Incidents*, occurrences, are textually produced. The pleasure in the text lies in this constant New and this constant Other, but

¹⁴ "Sur la place du petit Socco, chemise bleue au vent, figure de Désordre, un garçon en colère (c'est-à-dire ici ayant tous les traits de la folie) gesticule et invective un Européen (Go home!). Il disparaît. Quelques secondes plus tard, un chant annonce l'approche d'un enterrement; le cortège paraît. Parmi les porteurs (à relais) du cercueil, le même garçon, provisoirement assagi" (Barthes 2002: 95).

also in the irreducibility to a single, all-dominating logic. This volume thus forms, with its succession of definitively discontinuous microtexts and micronarratives, a robust piece of experimental travel literature¹⁵. Everything is filled with movements, yet denies any sort of attempt to reconstruct the travel-movements of a traveler. The “Disorder” is not carried over to “Order”.

Tangier and its Petit Socco stand for a world that is experienced for all of its senses and sensuousness, a world that is populated by Moroccans and Europeans, by the poor, the rich, and the dropouts. Frequently, the micronarratives recount border-crossings of many sorts, as presented in these two micronarratives printed in immediate succession:

On the beach at Tangiers (families, fags, boys), some old workmen, like very slow, very ancient insects, rake the sand.

*

Selam, a veteran from Tangiers, bursts out laughing because he has met three Italians who were of no use to him: “They thought I was feminine!” (Barthes 1992: 19)¹⁶

Borders between races, between animals and people, between languages and cultures, between social and political affiliations, between logics, orthodoxies, and ideologies are stepped across constantly and challenge sense in favor of the senses. Movements by car or plane, by train or taxi blend together, as in the traversing of a city, travel movements that do not wish to be arranged into a *single* travel movement. The micronarratives refuse to give themselves to the *single* sense, the *single* travel movement, the *single* logic: from the beginning, Tangier becomes a polylogical place to which a stringent occidental logic of identity and identification is applied ad absurdum.

Thus Tangier becomes a microcosm of textual pleasure that also always provides a look at (homo)sexual pleasure. At the same time, the body-logics refuse to be reconciled to body-politics, to Moroccan politics, and to the hanging of possibly innocent victims by a dependent judicial system:

Abdellatif – a voluptuous boy – peremptorily justifies the Baghdad hangings. The guilt of the accused is obvious, since the trial went so fast: the case was clear. Contradiction

¹⁵ C.f. Ette 2013: 105.

¹⁶ “Sur la plage de Tanger (familles, tantes, garçons), de vieux ouvriers, comme des insectes très anciens et très lents, déblayent le sable”. * “Selam, vétérans de Tanger, s’esclaffe parce qu’il a rencontré trois Italiens qui lui ont fait perdre son temps : ‘Ils croyaient que j’étais féminine !’” (Barthes 2002: 959–960).

between the brutality of this nonsense and the fresh warmth of his body, the availability of his hands, which I continue, somewhat dazed, to hold and to caress while he pours out his vengeful catechism. (Barthes 1992: 23)¹⁷

In the head, the short trial that was held for the accused. In the body, however, the desire for pleasure – and the pleasure of the text: “The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas I do” (Barthes 1992: 17)¹⁸. The Moroccan *Incidents* exist on greatly varying levels in an intensive exchange with *Le Plaisir du texte*. Barthes’ *Incidents* goes back to trips to Morocco in the years 1965¹⁹, 1968, and 1969, but above all to an extended stay in Rabat, where Barthes, deeply disappointed in the events of May, 1968 in Paris, began a guest lectureship in September 1969, a position that definitely ended just one year later. Like Japan, Morocco in the 60s offered the French intellectual the opportunity to newly organize the atopian²⁰, utopian, and above all heterotopian horizons of his thought, proceeding from certain islands of concentrated meaning as polylogical life-landscapes. The microcosm of Tangier and within it, above all, the world around the Petit Socco form radically open structures that allow Tangier to become the fractal of a philosophy that rebels against the dominant rationality of the West: for a *dépossession de l’Occident* pursued and propagated by Barthes, a fundamental “disappropriation of the Occident” at the level of the sentence, of reason, of an all-pervasive logic (Barthes 1979: 47; see also Ette 2007: 23).

As in his early text *En Grèce* (“In Greece”), that in a certain way contains his program of writing for an *écriture courte* every bit as much *in nuce* as do the movement-forms of his archipelagic thinking, Tangier, and Rabat and Marrakesh too, emerge as island cities, as insular cityscapes (Barthes 2002: 54–59). Yet they remain in an idiosyncratically unfocused discontinuity that extracts these cities, like islands, from a continent that is literarily staged in the form of a shattered fractality: Morocco as archipelago, subject to no continuous, continental logic. And like Japan, Tangier, with its beaches, its public squares, and its people, is an island.

17 “Abdellatif – si voluptueux – justifie péremptoirement les pendaisons de Bagdad. La culpabilité des accusés est évidente puisque le procès a été très rapide : c’est donc que le cas était clair. Contradiction entre la brutalité de cette bêtise et la tiédeur fraîche de son corps, la disponibilité de ses mains, que je continue, assez hébété, à tenir et à caresser pendant qu’il débite son catéchisme vengeur” (Barthes 2002: 962).

18 “Le Plaisir du texte, c’est ce moment où mon corps va suivre ses propres idées – car mon corps n’a pas les mêmes idées que moi” (Barthes 2002: 228).

19 In his annual report for the EPHE, Barthes makes note of a guest seminar in November, 1965 at the *Faculté des Lettres* in Rabat (OC II 111).

20 C.f. Oster 2006.

In Tangier, different worlds occasionally collide with sudden force: fault lines between Europe and the Maghreb, but also between North America and North Africa can be experienced up-close. Tangier is also a transatlantic migratory space. In the microtexts, the different worlds collide abruptly and violently – and from just this shock, this collision, arises that which we may designate as the once again archipelagic transareal²¹ landscape of theory that is this time no longer only Mediterranean, but instead connects different continents to one another. Tangier, with its Petit Socco, is a fractal of the transareal variety: here, the fault lines between different worlds can be experienced bodily. The “disappropriation of the Occident” sketched out by Barthes affects not last Western societies’ “dropouts”, who quite literally take possession of the city:

At the Socco, in July, the terrace is full of people. A group of hippies takes a table, one couple among them; the husband is a plump blond fellow wearing nothing under his overalls; the wife is in a long Wagnerian nightgown; she holds the hand of a tiny limp white girl whom she encourages to shit on the sidewalk, between the legs of her companions who do not react. (Barthes 1992: 18)²²

Roland Barthes, who probably completed his *Incidents* in 1969, had also sketched out this microcosm of contrasts in that same year in an essay for the Parisian magazine *Communications*, though he indicates there, under the title “A Case of Cultural Criticism”, the aporias of a western civilization that reveals itself in its counter-movements to be dominant and hegemonic (Barthes 2002: 544–546). Would it not be possible to relate this to other movements that level criticism at the West and at the same time exert or even multiply the West’s dominance? As in the ultra-short texts of his *Incidents*, Barthes attempted in his article to cast light on the hippie movement, specifically in terms of the contradictions in its cultural criticism, from a point of view that he would never have taken in this piece without the experiential knowledge and knowledge for living gained from his trips to Morocco. Barthes’ attempt at a deliberate disappropriation of the Occident does not stop short of criticizing western critics of the western lifestyle. Thus Barthes shows in his *Incidents* a Tangier in which the hippies have pursued the myth of the city, taken possession of it,

²¹ On the concept of the transareal, see Ette 2012.

²² “Au petit Socco, en juillet, la terrasse est pleine de monde. Vient s’asseoir un groupe de hippies, dont un couple; le mari est un gros blondasse nu sous une salopette d’ouvrier, la femme est en longue chemise de nuit wagnérienne; elle tient par la main une petite fille blanche et molle; elle la fait chier sur le trottoir; entre les jambes de ses compagnons que ne s’en émeuvent pas” (Barthes 2002: 959).

for a time at least, uninhibitedly living out their form of life as though it were the norm of life. The hippies appear here as aggressive western occupiers: as do the Moroccans – it is critical to add – the Parisian intellectuals are far from alone here.

The *écriture courte* in the Moroccan *Incidents*, more radically executed than in other travel-literature texts, leaves the reading public with enormous empty spaces for creative completion, and these empty spaces were quickly “filled” autobiographically – not only with an eye to the usually homosexual²³ and at the same time heterocultural love affairs that appear repeatedly on the surface of the text. It is certain: one may well formulate that for Barthes, Tangier was not the place of his “Noli me tangere”. But the reduction of the city of Tangier and of Tangier’s significance to Barthes to the level of homosexual lust and love is far more than problematic²⁴. For in light of Barthes’ aesthetic of pleasure, we must guard against all-too-easy biographizing identifications, if we are dealing with a multilogical text-landscape that cannot be understood to be centered on a single point of view or to be pursuant to a single logic. As it is in Severo Sarduy’s work, the Petit Socco, the Zoco Chico, is a textual laboratory that seeks to undermine the central perspective of occidental sentence structure, occidental first-person constructions, occidental logic. In this textual sense, Tangier is a laboratory, but also a fractal of a Parisian theory that sensually textualizes Tangier.

The complexity and radicality of this travel-literary text turn the focus away from the movements of the traveler (as classically presented, so to speak, in the itinerary of an Ibn Battuta) to the movements of the readers who, beyond Barthes’ early speech on “The Death of the Author”, first published in 1967, are moving through their own textual landscapes of theory (Barthes 2002: 491–495; see also Ette 2013: 80–88). Here there is no longer a center of meaning or sense, nor a center of the senses. As in Sarduy’s dense text “Tanger”, that is not without reason dedicated to Barthes, the myth is stored away through intertextual references and reverences, translated into a landscape of theory that allows Tangier to become transit in a very different way than in the work of Ibn Battuta.

As a text-island, Tangier is an I(s)land world in itself, with its own complex world; but as an I(s)land world, Tangier is also part of a globe-spanning Island World that is of an archipelagic sort and which projects this polylogical landscape that rests upon discontinuities into the Petit Socco itself. Everything here is audible, visible, available to be lived and experienced sensuously. Tangier

²³ Early on, an autobiographical reading of these passages caught on that, in connection with other texts by Barthes, were read as “confessions”, as it were. See for instance Knight 1993.

²⁴ See, among others, Hargreaves 2005: 55–64; and Algalarrondo 2010: 37, 170, et al.

becomes an island-fractal of a world that must be read from continually changed perspectives, as in the microtextual travel-text itself. The North Moroccan harbor city is not fixed as an alterity, as a stable Other, but is transformed into a *Mobile* that can be not only heard, but instead, as a soundscape, can be experienced and relived. That which may be expected with the name of Tangier is not erased, but adopted: the routes of the traveler do not become routines. The city at the entrance to and the exit from the Mediterranean advances, in a far more experimental sense than in Pier Paolo Pasolini's Rome, to become a *città aperta*, an open city in not only a transmediterranean but also in a transatlantic sense.

Tangier transit

In the following, a jump will be made to Latin American literature which, within the periphery of texts dedicated to Tangier, played and plays a role that is at best marginal, mostly unperceived, and thus invisible. Nevertheless, in the midst of the plentiful Tangier-literature, it is the novel of an outstanding Central American author that delineates that image of the city as transit, as we have already encountered with Ibn Battuta and Roland Barthes. The following section will thus examine the novel (published in 1999 in Spain) *La orilla africana* ("The African Shore"), by Guatemalan Rodrigo Rey Rosa²⁵.

Tangier appears here from the beginning as a movement-space, where at first, not the actual city, but a strip of coastline in the immediate vicinity of Tangier is placed in the foreground, thus steering the view to the specific topographical and geographical situation of the harbor city. In this way, a tension-field of contrasts between sea, land, and city arises at both the entrance to and the exit from the Strait of Gibraltar. For it is a raw, hard coast that offers no ideal grazing land for sheep: exposed just as much to the winds as to the ocean surf, with rocks that loom up against the onslaught of the forces of nature, and with people and animals who constantly seek to find shelter here. It is a world exposed to the currents of wind and water alike, placed at the utmost end of Africa and directly across from those lights that mark the southwestern tip of Europe. Even in the title, there is a certain reversal of the usual western perspective and expression. For Tangier looks upon history from the shore of Africa.

It is a raw, truly archaic land in which the first thing to appear is the figure of a young native shepherd rather than the so very international city of Tangier,

²⁵ A further connection between Tangier and Latin American literature is pointed out by Ingen-schay 2014.

which we come to know only later on in the course of the novel. The figure of the shepherd comes to us as though from another time, from an early history, from the beginnings of a literature that in Mesopotamia created the figure, at first living among the beasts, of that shepherd Enkidu in the *Gilgamesh* epic who was to play such an important role in the process of civilization and in the relationship between city and countryside (see Maul 2005: 9–42).

The shepherd Hamsa, however, does not guard his flock in the Land Between the Rivers, but in that two-continent world in which Africa and Europe, Morocco and Spain lie opposite one another and represent the two Pillars of Hercules, the Spanish Ceuta and the British Gibraltar, the last remnants of the formerly powerful Spanish and British colonial empires. Again and again, even in just the first chapter, the remains of old colonial possessions of European powers show up and provide a view to a history of colonialism that admittedly, in the figure of the shepherd, gains a completely different historical (essentially pre- and early-historical) depth of field. We find ourselves at a positively archaic place of natural forces, but also an archaic place in terms of literature, of narrative: that of the shepherd and the flock.

The shepherd Hamsa presents without a doubt the most puzzling figure of this novel that – if we look at the foreword by Catalanian Pere Gimferrer – unfolds within the tension-field between clarity and puzzlement (Rey Rosa 1999: 9). Even in the very incipit of this text, the author, born in Guatemala in 1958, introduces us to the world of the shepherd, shaped by irrational, animistic imaginings, by sacrificial rites and amulets:

It was still dark when Hamsa got up, and the wind out of the east was whistling over the cliff face, rattling the branches and leaves like a thousand maracas. He could hear the waves crashing violently on the rocks at the foot of the cliff. (Rey Rosa 2013: 5)²⁶

Right at the start of the first of the total 55 short chapters, the force and constant motion on this coast – still in the night of the stories and of history, as it were – are present and have become the present. In the darkness before the gray of morning, nothing is visible at first: everything settles upon a landscape that can at first be recognized “only” as a soundscape, but which from the start is shaped by the force of the wind and the waves of the sea on the African shore of the *Estrecho*.

26 “Hamsa se levantó cuando todavía estaba oscuro y el viento del Este soplabla con fuerza para hacer sonar el follaje de los árboles como mil maracas y silbar entre las peñas del acantilado, al pie del cual se estrellaban violentamente las olas del mar” (Rey Rosa 1999: 17).

While the Strait of Gibraltar may be one of the most-traveled waterways in the world, the plot of the novel is not set in the lively atmosphere of the city of Tangier, populated by people from all different regions of the world, but rather, in an impassable place in nature where quite nearby, the rattle of Latin American maracas brings in a quasi-transareal world of sound. This Latin American soundscape not only prepares us for the Latin American protagonist who will only later be introduced, and not only provides us with important clues regarding the figure of the narrator of the text, it also points out to us that the landscape, at first emerging in darkness, depicts a landscape of theory (Ette 2013: 49–60) in which we can already recognize the key to all movements in the novel. In the sound of this landscape, if we go back to Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on hearing, everything becomes presence and present, outside and inside all at once (Nancy 2010: 20–31). Tangier is thus, as already seen in Ibn Battuta, less a city-space than a movement-space that can neither be thought of nor understood without the entire coastal landscape and without its intercontinental setting.

A lamb from the shepherd's flock went missing the previous evening, and Hamsa sets out to search, whereby he must first clear a path through the brush and then past the ruins of the former "Spanish boating club" before he discovers the frightened, quaking animal at the foot of a cliff, "cornered between two boulders, splashed intermittently by the waves" (Rey Rosa 2013: 6)²⁷. It is the image of a life driven into a tight spot, a helpless creature in need of protection that can find no way out and plummets desperately into the sea. Hamsa succeeds just in time in pulling the lamb from the water and carrying the weakened animal back to the flock. The connections between human being and animal play a crucial role in the novel: in this relationship, living, surviving, and coexisting are (re)presented from a set of perspectives that are at once alienating and compressive²⁸.

The ocean, however, does not only stand for the natural forces that dominate this strip of coastline, at the same time, they also form the basis for those cultural forces that have transformed the ocean currents at the geographical dividing line between Africa and Europe into a mainline of those streams of traffic that connect this region both transoceanically and transcontinentally to the entire world. This does not mean that the harbor of Tangier – that is currently undergoing large-scale, modernized development between Tangier and Ceuta – could have access to all of these ship movements, but that these old movements, perpetuated in the

²⁷ In the original the "club náutico español" and "arrinconado entre dos peñas salpicadas intermitentemente por el reventar de las olas" (Rey Rosa 1999: 18).

²⁸ On the relevance of Animal Studies, see Meyer-Krentler 2013.

present and future, have created a complex vectorial landscape that cannot be understood as a static space.

Just as Europe's land is visible during the day and its lights at night, so too by day and night can the great ships be discerned on their way through the strait. Europe is ever-present – and also in those movements that have established themselves running across the ones already named. For under the cover of night come the smugglers, like Hamsa's uncle who brings from the opposite coast not only the knock-off Nike athletic shoes for the young shepherd (with which Hamsa can hardly bear to part), but also the dreams of a life of wealth, a life with big cars and beautiful blonde women: dreams that are, of course, also dreamed on the African side of the Strait of Gibraltar and which have lost none of their attraction in the 21st century.

The African coast is unthinkable without its European opposite coast – and vice versa: in their tension-field, transmediterranean and transatlantic movements merge with one another. Spanish-occupied Ceuta, like British-occupied Gibraltar, bears witness to the still-high geostrategic importance of all of these positions and movements that lie in the power calculations of the great (former) European colonial powers. Time and again, this landscape of theory is worked into the novel, as “from a distance, the Djebel Musa, the pale Pillar of Hercules, dashed upon the African shore” becomes as visible as the white ships “that move off in the direction of Gibraltar, leaving a long, cream-colored wake behind them” (Rey Rosa 2013: 64)²⁹. As it is on the charts of the strait, the surface of the sea is densely criss-crossed with the routes of ships.

The Guatemalan author who, during his flight from the violence in his homeland and in other wide regions of Central America, had found refuge in Morocco and occupied himself intensively with the country's history, constructs from the 55 short, discontinuous chapters of his novel a story that overlays the various phases of the history of this border region between the oceans, between the continents, and between the empires, in a manner both subtle and subversive. In the vision of Tangier and its raw, rugged surroundings, the novel introduces, from the first mention of the “Spanish boating club”, the expansion of Spanish, Portuguese, French, or British colonialism; it points to the old Roman roads on which the lions captured in North Africa were transported by thousands to the arenas of the empire; it mentions the ships upon which thousands of Moroccans, thousands of Africans try their luck at getting to the Promised Land of the European coast on the other side. These are not yet the floods of refugees of our 21st century, and yet these blend in almost seamlessly with the image of migrations sketched out in *La orilla africana* in 1999, except for the fact that it is long since not just

²⁹ “desde donde podía verse, en la lejanía, el Djebel Musa, la pálida columna de Hércules derumbada sobre la orilla africana” (Rey Rosa 1999: 61).

the coast of Northern Morocco, but the “African coast” in general from which the migrants and refugees are setting out in the direction of the North.

The novel follows all of these movements, creating a complex and sometimes confusing image of movement which cannot leave out the tourists, nomads, migrants, and refugees from Europe, the USA, or Latin America. We are looking at a highly vectorized space here where beneath current movements, earlier movements can be seen and sensed now, but are also stored away for the future. From the beginning, the space of Tangier is staged from a wide variety of perspectives as a transareal motion-landscape of languages and cultures, of forms of life and norms of life, of spaces and of dreams (Ortiz Wallner 2008: 247). Tangier becomes a place in which the transareal may be localized, as it were, between worlds.

This transareality by no mean restricts itself to the north-south relationship between Africa and Europe. The country on the Strait is not only connected to the whole world by sea, but also, thanks to the technology of flight, by air. It is thus not surprising that it is not a citizen of the United States but a South American that the Central American author leads to Tangier, indeed having him become virtually addicted to this place of movement. Along with the Moroccan Hamsa and the young Frenchwoman Julie, who lives with the wealthy Madame Choiseul in an idyllic neighborhood where Hamsa’s grandparents must provide for themselves in their old age, this Colombian traveler who has supposedly lost his passport is the third central figure, completing the triangular configuration, not only of love that is hoped for or longed for, but also that of North Africa, South America, and Western Europe. For all of them but Hamsa, Tangier is transit. A configuration by chance, certainly, but not by chance transareal.

The coming together of these three figures is just as transitory as the hotels and flophouses in which the Colombian spends his time, having lost not only his passport, but his previous life and life’s goal too. His experiences with Moroccan prostitutes, for whose services he possessed enough money at first, form an important component of that “Trans(it)Area”³⁰ in which the protagonists meet before they become lost once more to one another’s arms, eyes, and minds: Tangier is transit.

So the time in this movement-space is also always deferred time: a time that is shaped by motions that bring things together, but then again, by motions that pull things apart, a time that knows no simple, continuous, all-connecting time-reckoning. At the end of a dialog with Julie about the presence of antiquity and its transmediterranean connections, the Colombian turns around and looks down from above toward the West, the *Occidente*: “where the sea opened”³¹ and he

30 See Ette/Mackenbach/Müller/Ortiz Wallner 2011.

31 In the original: “donde se abría el mar” (Rey Rosa 1999: 124).

becomes certain of the fact that he could be enjoying this view across the sea and across times for the last time (Rey Rosa 2013: 103). The sea is the movement-surface that is capable of establishing all transareal connections, but of separating them again as well. Only the transit lasts.

Consequently, the affair that connects the young Frenchwoman to the South American – in whose hands she first sees that injured owl by which she is fascinated from that point on – is only of short duration: barely longer than their shared use of soft drugs in the Colombian's seedy hotel room. The idyll that (from the European perspective) makes reference to the mythical time of Tangier as well as to the histories of both Tangier and Colombia in connection with the drug trade is quickly over. As in the case of Severo Sarduy, soft drugs and soft seductions, *drogue* and *drague* combine with one another in a "DR(A/O)GUE" (Sarduy 1992: 87). Tangier offers no perspectives on the future to this dissimilar couple whom chance has led to one another for a short time, for in this atmosphere more than perhaps anywhere else, it is opportunity that creates love. Rodrigo Rey Rosa's novel knows about myth, brings it up, but then parts from it again – none of the protagonists of *La orilla africana* finds great freedom therein.

As a Trans(it)Area, Tangier is the space of the traveler – and at the same time, the space of fictions. *A beau mentir qui vient de loin*. In a space in which stories swirl about, in which the British occupy a rock that still bears the name of its Arab conqueror while the return of this rock is demanded by those Spanish who, for their part, continue to occupy the other Pillar of Hercules on the African shore, lasting borders are neither stable nor static. The same holds true with the borders between fact and fiction, between creative writing and truth, between reading and living. How could they be? These are facts in transit, temporary truths, life from what has been read. The books that lie ignored all about the floor in the Colombian's hotel room seem not to have been without a diffuse effect upon him. For fictions and autofictions have long since taken possession of his imaginary world:

He didn't like to lie but sometimes the truth about himself seemed so unacceptable that he let himself, always thinking he'd change things later so the fiction would match the reality. He *could* have been single, though in the eyes of the law he was married – since he had lived several years with his girlfriend – just as he could have been something other than an ordinary tourist with a mislaid passport. (Rey Rosa 2013: 80)³²

32 “No le gustaba mentir pero a veces la verdad acerca de sí mismo le parecía inaceptable y entonces se lo permitía, siempre con la intención de cambiar las cosas para que sus ficciones llegaran a coincidir con la realidad. Podía no estar casado, como lo estaba de hecho, ni ser un simple turista con el pasaporte extraviado” (Rey Rosa 1999: 100).

The truth of the lies and the lied-about truths that become lies for life, life-lies, form an inextricable textuality. Life in Tangier cannot be aligned with life elsewhere, with his former work, for instance, or with his current wife in Colombia. Facts and fictions can no longer be kept neatly separate: in Tangier, everything is in transit. Even the glance in the mirror, which has helped many characters in novels before him to become aware of themselves, brings no clarity, but only reflection. Reflected in the face of the living there is a skull of death, just as Death ceaselessly grins at life.

Fictions had long since took possession of his life; bad fictions certainly, which he does not know how to use to his benefit, and which bring no sort of clarity to his life. Tangier has obviously thrown him out of his old life, but without hurling him into a new one: nothing to be expected, no promise for the future becomes apparent. Even when the old lies begin to blur on the western horizon: Tangier is only a progression of ever-worsening hotel rooms, and thus transit-spaces that open out only upon new transit-spaces.

And yet, where no firm point of orientation can be established in the realm between persons, an important significance finally comes to the human-animal relationship, which was introduced from the beginning between shepherd and flock. Only to the captured and inexpensively purchased owl does the Colombian seem to be faithful, to care for lovingly – even when he is thrown out of the hotel because of the bird. The owl has long since become that object of human desire, the pursuit of which connects Hamsa, Julie, and the Colombian to one another, but at the same time separates them. For the owl has powers by which everyone seeks to profit, though in very different ways. The Moroccan novel diegesis with its North African-South American-Western European relationality forms not only a transit-area, but also a TransArea in which the paths of the protagonists, but also their languages and cultures, their habits and convictions and religious beliefs incessantly intersect and cross(out). Around every street name, every street in Tangier, other streets, other names, other languages, and other cultures emerge. The urban space of Tangier proves to be a multilingual and multicultural mobile that is not only in constant motion, but must be viewed from mobile, moving perspectives.

The multilogical openness of Tangier includes not only the greatly varying European or American origins, but also constantly brings Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious beliefs and imaginings into uninterrupted communication. Every object, every habit, every history may be viewed from the greatest variety of perspectives, differently in every instance, without ever transforming into a logic to which everything is beholden. The archaic and the animistic are just as present here as are agnosticism and orthodoxy. The city thus becomes a whole world, *urbi et orbi*, and allows the transit to become a fractal, as it were, a *modèle réduit* of a world that not only assembles itself here, but also comes

apart. Convivence rests here upon contingency. Consequently, the figures of the novel turn into configurations whose coexistence always remains precarious and discontinuous. In this way, the novel develops a transitory convivence that in its discontinuous structure of 55 short chapters submits to no single logic. At the same time, as in Roland Barthes' *Incidents* everything runs up against the limits of that which one can best call constellations of violence. This violence, which runs through the novel from the beginning, shapes the convivence that nonetheless allows the many logics to exist side by side. The convivence thus remains precarious, resting on a deferred time about which no one can say how long its reckoning of time might still exist – until new powers, and with them, new forms of violence appear on the horizon. Tangier lies on the African side of occidental history, in the western region of the Orient, on the Atlantic side of the Mediterranean: the city obliges us to distance ourselves from, and take leave of, any sort of central perspective.

Rodrigo Rey Rosa's novel stresses again and again temporary, transitory movements: not only the hotel rooms, but every type of accessway, every type of passage of a temporary nature, such as the taxi-rides that offer mobile transit-spaces in which new but temporally and spatially limited encounters time and again take place and can be experienced. Tangier Taxi: the short Chapter XXXVII, limited to a scant page, linguistically records such a trip, one of those encounters that obviously begins in Arabic. There, the taxi driver asks his new customer:

Tú, ¿eres marroquí? / –No. / –Tunecino? / –no. / –Egipcio? / –No. / –¿De dónde eres? / –De Colombia. / –¿Pero hablan árabe en Colombia? / –No. Español. / –Aquí también hablamos español –dijo el taxista en español tangerino–. ¿Cómo es la vida en tu país? / –Más o menos como aquí. / –Horrible, entonces. / –Es verdad. (Rey Rosa 1999: 109)³³

It is a short, staccato-like dialog in which national affiliations and national languages no longer establish identities, but at best indicate possible origins. The taxi driver does not succeed in guessing the origin of his customer. Does the Latin American protagonist come from that important and influential group of immigrants that, primarily since the end of the 19th century, fled from the civil wars in the Near East and above all from Lebanon to the safety of Colombia's Caribbean coast, but also to Central America and Chile? The Arab-American connections³⁴ evoked in this passage, that have a long tradition and are introduced only

33 I will refrain here from including a translation of the failed attempts of the taxi driver to guess the nationality of his customer.

34 C.f. Ette/Pannewick 2008.

in passing, clearly indicate living conditions under which a life in Morocco or in Colombia appears equally terrible. Tangier is staged as a transareal city, but is no longer presented as a myth; instead, it is demythologized. Tangier Transit: the myth of Tangier seems here to have come to an end: “Horrible, entonces” – as terrible as anywhere else.

The novel therefore does not end in Tangier, but returns to the rocky coastal region at the exit of the Strait of Gibraltar. The three protagonists are connected, as mentioned above, by an animal to which are attributed magical powers and thus vital forces: the large owl, fascinating to all, which as a captive creature is constantly changing owners and therefore, as a trapped animal like the desperate lamb, finds itself in a state of profound dependence upon human beings. After Hamsa’s ultimately failed attempt to sleep with the Frenchwoman Julie, who demands the release of the owl Hamsa has stolen as the price for sleeping with him, it will be the flight of the now-healed owl into freedom that brings the Guatemalan author’s novel to an end that is equally impressive and ambiguous. This fascinating narrative text that began before the break of dawn thus comes to the end of the final chapter after sundown, with the flight of the nameless owl over that very same rugged area where the action of the novel had begun:

The owl launched itself into the emptiness and flew with the wind toward the light, dying now where the earth ended and there was only sea. It retraced its flight past the shepherd’s hut, and, from on high, it could see the woman, who had put on her slippers and was walking hurriedly along the strip of grass bordering the asphalt road between the walls. The owl flew up as far as the summit and saw, in the distance, the glassy lights that lit up the hills, covered in a mantle of white houses fading into the folds of the parched and fissured countryside. It dipped down then, flying over the treetops toward a large abandoned house in the middle of a thick grove. It flew in through a window, greeted by the cries of the birds nesting there. It crossed through the house, flying from room to room through the hallways until it found an attic, with some roof tiles missing, the floorboards broken or completely rotten and a convenient cleft in the rough, dark wall. (Rey Rosa 2013: 135)³⁵

35 “Se lanzó al vacío y voló con el viento hacia la luz que moría donde terminaba la tierra y sólo estaba el mar. Remontó el vuelo al pasar sobre el cobertizo del pastor, y, desde lo alto, alcanzó a ver a la mujer, que ya se había calzado y andaba de prisa por el filete de hierba que bordeaba el camino asfaltado entre los muros. Se elevó hasta la cumbre del monte y vio, en la distancia, las luces vidriosas que iluminaban las colinas cubiertas por un manto de casa blancas que se perdían entre los pliegues del campo sediento y agrietado. Bajó para volar sobre las copas de los árboles hacia una casona abandonada en medio de un bosque tupido. Entró por una ventana y fue recibida por los gritos de los pájaros que ya anidaban allí. Recurrió la casona volando de cuarto en cuarto por los pasillos hasta que encontró una hendidura conveniente en la pared áspera y oscura de un desván, donde faltaban algunas tejas y las tablas del piso estaban rotas o completamente podridas” (Rey Rosa 1999: 157).

The flight of the bird again creates, *from movement*, that is, from no fixed perspective, that space where the protagonists of *La orilla africana* came together, found one another, then lost one another again. In the closing section of the novel, the omnipresence of a nature that is ill-treated but unimpressed by humanity makes Tangier disappear on the horizon once more. As at the beginning, the ruins of human buildings, of human coexistence, are also recognizable at the end of the narrative, but are now becoming the homes of animals that populate a dilapidated human past.

To this degree, it is the movements of animals that set the beginning and end points of the novel. But it is hardly likely that the owl will allow himself to be captured a second time by human hands. From the air, it sees for the last time the quickly departing Julie, who was ready to have sex with Hamsa the shepherd, had not the dimensions of his circumcised member (the preparation he was using seems to have been effective) and a purulent spot on his testicles (which was zoomed in on, as in the earlier instance with the young woman's inverted nipples) induced her to take flight herself (Rey Rosa 1999: 21, 103). The owl, for whose freedom she was going to give herself over, is free again; the humans are as little capable of living in peace with it as they are with one another. The Colombian, the Moroccan, and finally the Frenchwoman disappear from the novel's sightline. The story after the story might well begin.

Even if the masculine potency of the shepherd may remind us of Enkidu from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and might be a late legacy of old and archaic history/-ies, what is crucial is that it never comes to a union of the young woman with Hamsa or to his integration into an urban civilization, even if the young Moroccan is thoroughly enthusiastic about his imitation Nikes and dreams of blonde women in his own sports car. Unlike the ancient mythic figure Enkidu, who is literally pulled into the bed of an urban civilization by the beautiful prostitute Shamhat (Maul 2005: 52), Hamsa does not move into the city, but stays outside of its gates. And unlike the protagonists of the novel, who due to their inner turmoil finally end up as beings with no fixed abode and lose themselves, as it were, in the transit-space of their paths, it is only the bird, the owl, who is able to find a house and make for itself a home within a community of birds of many kinds.

In the figure of the owl, that wisdom that in the West has been attached since ancient times to its nightly flight appears once again in Rodrigo Rey Rosa's novel. While the attempts of all of the protagonists to develop some knowledge regarding the possibilities of coexistence meet with failure, and while the various woman characters, again differently from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, do not succeed in freeing the men and themselves by the wit of deception from the weight of their emotional baggage and leading them to the wonders of desire, at the end of this novel of short chapters, a world comes together in the flight of the owl; a world that in its transareal fragmentary character remains – as Clifford Geertz put it a few years beforehand – a “world in pieces” (Geertz 1998: 91–117).

In a long tradition carried on by Rodrigo Rey Rosa, the world thus continues to be held together by the movements of a bird, much in the way that a parrot in Alexander von Humboldt's travel work is the last speaker of the language of the extinct Atures, (see Humboldt 1986: 192, 210) in the way that Mário de Andrade elevates this Humboldtian parrot to a truly continental greatness at the end of *Macunaíma* (Andrade 1998), in the way Max Aub can only view the world of the *univers concentrationnaire* from the perspective of a raven in his *Manuscrito Cuervo* (Aub 1999), or in the way that, in Cécile Waijsbrot's *Mémorial* (Waijsbrot 2005), a cold and frozen world may still be captured in the silhouette, the minimal movements, and the gaze of a snowy owl. That which has been destroyed and that which has gone missing is packed into the gaze of a bird; for in most cases, the great efforts of human beings to bring about a nonviolent coexistence between people of different heritages, of different cultures, and of different faiths do not avail them in the aforementioned works. Only from the bird's eye view does everything terrestrially disjointed fit together from out of movement.

With his novel *The African Shore*, the Guatemalan writer has nonetheless not given up on the attempt to grasp a still complete world, with all of its contrasts, its conflicts, and its fractures, within a narrative rhythm that in his short chapters of mostly one to five pages manages to bundle fractally a totality of origins and diversities. The diegesis of his TransitArea Morocco, where the Guatemalan author himself spent several years in self-imposed "exile", and the transareal structuring that includes differing geographical and cultural areas give rise in this text to an experimental space in which the limits of *ZusammenLebensWissen*, of knowledge for living together, are examined and tested as if in an experimental set-up. The myth of Tangier is meanwhile discreetly present, but distinctly disappears at the end behind the horizon of history.

It is in any case no coincidence that Rodrigo Rey Rosa, the author from Central America, chose for his experimental-protocol-as-diegesis not the Americas' narrow neck of land, but the narrow ocean strait between Africa and Europe – perhaps a late reflex to the fact that in the earliest maps of the Caribbean and Central America, the middle of the continent is sometimes depicted as an isthmus, but also occasionally as a strait. The alternating cartographic representations are probably due to the fact that the Spanish term "estrecho" can stand for either. But where might this "breakthrough" be set today? With his literature without a fixed abode, Rey Rosa succeeds in penetrating the frequent captivity in Central American literature with an American diegesis "of its own", in order to create anew a supposedly "foreign" spatiotemporality with the help of transareal movements. From the first sentence to the last, movements form a highly vectorized space in which the old movements that have crossed North Africa for millennia can still be found in the movements of the protagonists – for not without a reason is the young Julie a student of archaeology and therefore educated in finding the

streets of yesterday beneath the streets of today, in detecting the urban designs of yesterday under the city structures of today. And yet the flight of the owl points to a dimension that transcends the time of the human being and also leaves the history of Tangier, perpendicular to the times, perpendicular to the power structures, as still easily visible ruins behind it.

Consequently, the desire of the novel to create a totality of things that are learned about, invented, and experienced (the German *das Erfahrene*, *das Erfundene*, and *das Erlebte*) remains open in a radical way in the flight of the owl. In an old house, and thus in just that region that humans built up as a home and as the place of their coexistence, the owl – who does not inhabit the day, like the humans, but the night – finds its new residence. After all of the centuries of plundering, raids, and both colonial and post-colonial exploitation, the novel, which began with the fear of a lost animal, gives the wisdom and vital force of the owl the final word. For it seems to succeed in peacefully coexisting under one roof with birds of other sizes, other colors, and other origins. Is this a new Tangier – a Tangier of the animals? Or does this announce a new time-reckoning that begins *after* Tangier? Captive and bound, the owl had connected the lives of the three protagonists to one another. When its shackles were loosed and it took its flight to freedom, the bonds that connected these people in transit also fell away. From this point on, nothing connects the directions of these people's lives – except a nomadic existence in a transareal transit that finds in the Strait of Gibraltar its mobile *mise en abyme*. Tangier is transit, and thus its mythos, however much it might linger, is also transitory. In the awareness of this transit, however, there also appears that challenge that Tangier represents, from Ibn Battuta to Roland Barthes and Severo Sarduy, and on to Rodrigo Rey Rosa: the challenge to write in the literatures of the world, beyond the still-dominant spatial history, a movement-history that successfully brings about a new, mobile world-consciousness based on movements and migrations.

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