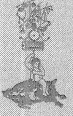


DIE KUNST DER REISE / THE ATHENS CONFERENCE - ΤΕΧΝΗ ΤΑΞΙΔΙΩΤΙΚΗ / ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

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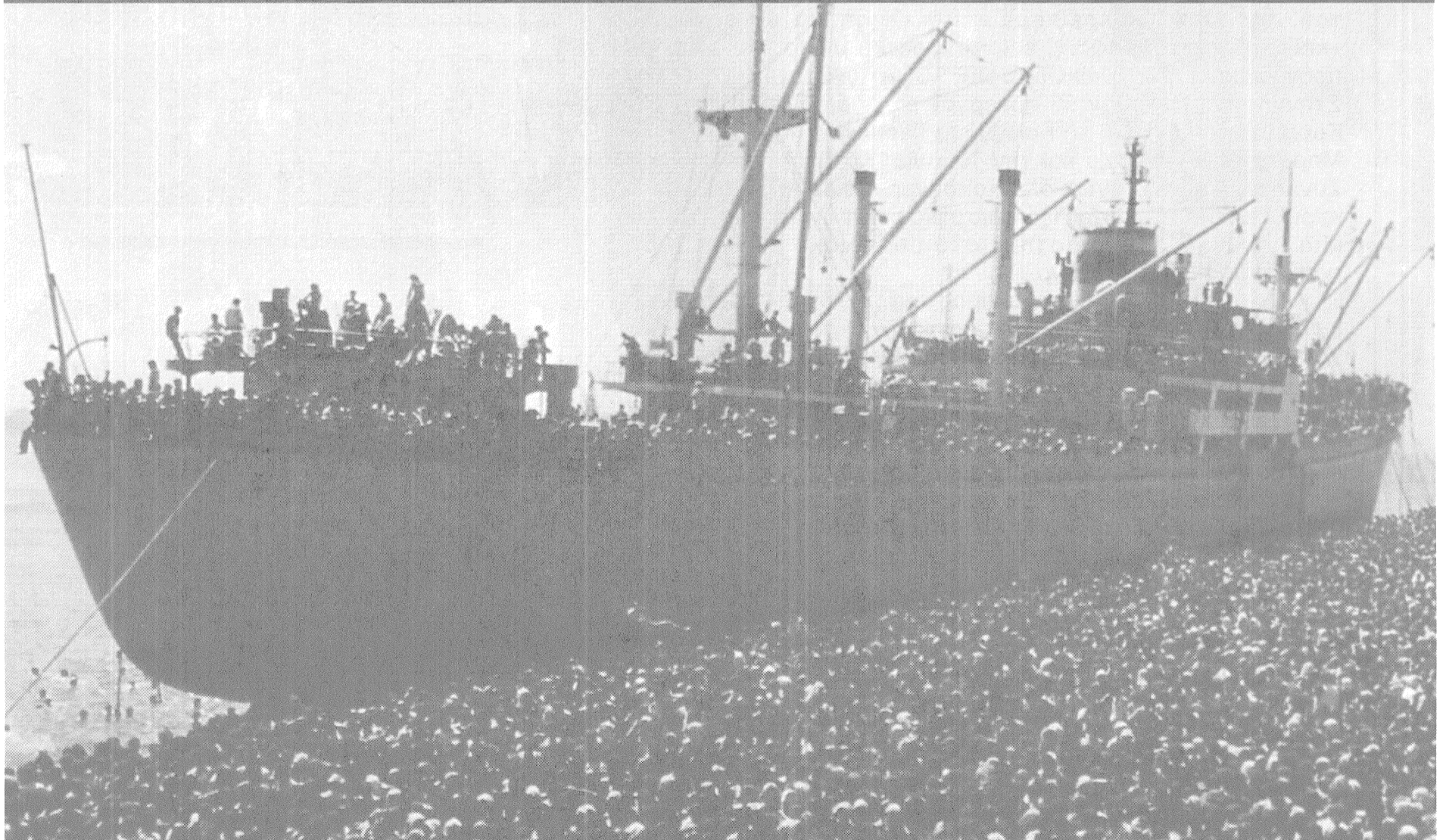
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THE ATHENS CONFERENCE



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**THE ATHENS CONFERENCE**

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DER BLAUE KOMPRESSOR

Gustav Deutsch / Hanna Schimek

Realized in co-operation with:

GOETHE INSTITUTE ATHENS

FOURNOS THEATER ATHENS

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**Athens Coordinator:**

Christina De Pian

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**Exhibition Photographs:**

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**Music coordination:**

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**Video documentation / Stills:**

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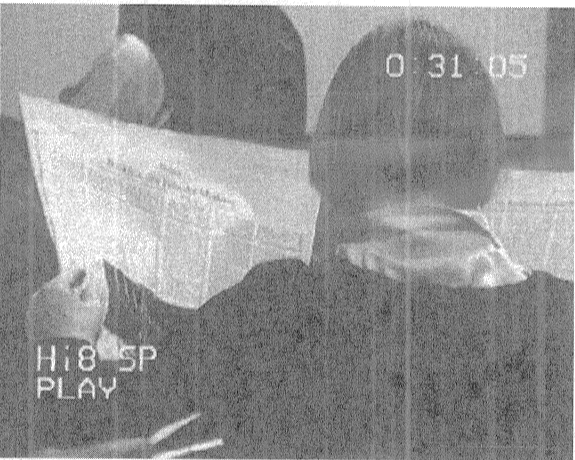
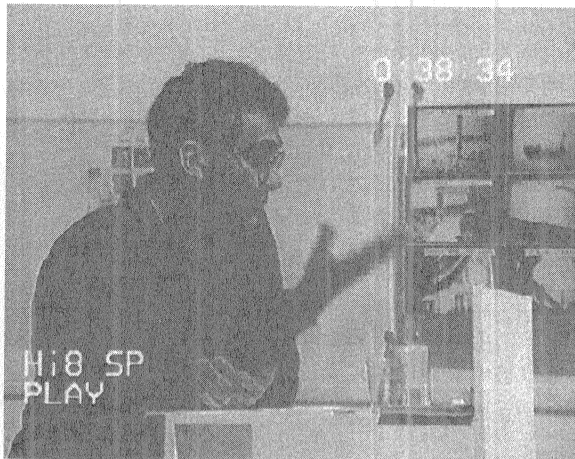
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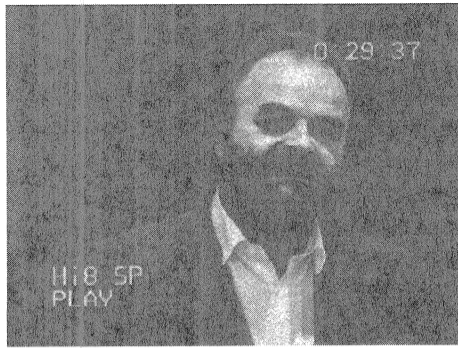
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## Travel rituals of a social scientist



ANTON JAKOB ESCHER

Born 1955, Germany.

1961-76 elementary school, grammar school / 1976-81 university training in geography, philosophy, Oriental studies and physics / 1978 marriage / 1987 birth of a son / 1990 birth of a daughter / since 1981 employed at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg.

ANTON ΓΙΑΚΟΜΠ ΕΣΣΕΡ

Γεννήθηκε το 1955 στη Γερμανία.

Από το 1961 ως το 1976 πήγε στο σχολείο. Από το 1976 ως το 1981 ακολούθησε πανεπιστημιακές σπουδές στη γεωγραφία, τη φιλοσοφία και τη μουσική. Παντρεύτηκε το 1978, το 1987 και το 1990 γεννήθηκαν αντίστοιχα ο γιός και η κόρη του. Από το 1981 εργάζεται στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Έρλανγκεν-Νυρεμβέργη.

Although I am on the road a lot professionally (by that I mean I travel with my work) I have never before taken a good look at the way I deal with my travelling or with the problems which arise from my frequent changes in location. Meeting up with Viennese artists *Hanna Schimek* and *Gustav Deutsch* in Rabat, Morocco and their inviting me to the *Athens Conference* prompted me to speak about motives for and ways of managing travel and to concentrate on the subject of my travel rituals. At first I had problems reflecting on the object and aims of my many travels. Yes, I really fought against having to consider my travels on any basis other than that of scientific discourse. The "gentle push" I was given by *Gustav Deutsch* in Athens, however, led to my giving a verbal presentation of my reflections, then only fragmentary. Since then, and after much deliberation, I have decided to express my thoughts on paper, after all. I hope that the gentle reader will be able to follow the exposition below, which actually is not intended for publication at all.

The following incomplete text and the few available photographs are intended in a rudimentary way both to explain my travel rituals and to make an attempt at depicting them. It will be useful to expound initially on three topics in order to be able to perceive and comprehend the academic's existential problem I am faced with, and the actions or travel rituals which follow: The aims of the science which is called social geography; taking methodical action, which in my opinion serves to provide access to a foreign society at a scientific level; and possible reasons for my having travelled and for my continuing to do so. These three topics lead ultimately to my existential problems, to the partial loss of human communication and the complete abandoning of the principle of having to be consistent at any time and place. My travel rituals are to be understood as a possible reaction or rather as stabilizing answers to these problems.

\* Academic goals of the science that is called social geography, or- What does a social geographer do?

My view of the science that is known as social geography and the way I see myself as a social geographer do not correspond in every respect with the convictions of all my colleagues, but we agree, or so I hope, on the most important aspects.

Social geography is, above all, a science which deals with people i.e. individuals, groups and communities, with their spatial relationship and with the earth's surface, as developed and shaped by man and by institutions i.e. by local communities, states and other organizations. The range of those topics picked out as central themes lies within the scale of the human living environment. The geographical and thus area-related questions are dependent on that sector of the earth's surface (city or country) under examination, or on the people, groups or communities chosen. Ideally, scientific analysis ranges over three areas:

Firstly, descriptions of the desired sector of the earth's surface or of the desired objects must be produced. The descriptions then eventually lead to thematic maps, abstract models, spatial distributions, spatial patterns and spatial characteristics of the subjects in question. Secondly, the histories and contexts associated with the knowledge summed up in those descriptions must be reconstructed. Thirdly, empirical information with regard to chosen elements of the earth's surface is recorded for the purpose of portraying functional and statistical connections.

Sophisticated methodical means have been developed for all three areas. Social geographers photograph, map out, sketch, measure, interview and

write. I refer those interested to the relevant reference books for a more complex presentation of these sophisticated methods and the numerous investigative techniques.

Geographers set down rules, trends and laws or make deductions from the discoveries made. On the basis of a collection of such constructs, attempts are made in vain, in my opinion, to formulate theories on how man, society and institutions act both by reacting to their spatial environment and by influencing it. The theories, models, rules and trends should somehow correlate with the living environment and with society. This means that the knowledge social geography has accumulated on the living environment and on society can be tested and assessed. I think that this demonstrates the difference between social geography and art. Anyway, that is how things should be, in my opinion.

Social geographers follow the above aims in foreign countries, too. Consequently, geographers travel to foreign countries. A basic understanding of a foreign culture is, in my opinion, a prerequisite for the social geographer's analysis of the people and societies of a foreign country.

\*One method for social science access to a foreign society

In almost all empirical social sciences the most capable minds have left out the question of how an approach towards a foreign culture can be possible. The discussion began with B. Malinkowski in the first decades of our century, and has found no end up to this day. Many colleagues tackling this problem have found a new solution: If asked about their concrete methodology with regard to approaching a foreign culture, they simply say nothing. Or they say: Everyone has their own method. Okay, I say to myself, then I, too, have my own method. I find the following attitude important with regard to work as a social scientist in a foreign culture:

In my opinion it makes sense as a social scientist to experience a partial socialization or a socialization later in life in a foreign culture. This means learning behaviour, rules of communication, everyday language etc. within a family situation. A prerequisite for this for any social scientist is a methodically purified attitude which might be thus described: it is useful to approach the foreign world with an "honest earnestness", i.e. with a conscious renunciation of existing prejudices and without using this approach or research as the means to another end. It is important to show an "indifferent pleasure" in the foreign world and in its foreign people. This should mean that one shows interest and enthusiasm for world and people, but that the interest does not in any way include intervention in the people's actions and activities. Initially the behaviour of the scientist in the foreign living environment should make no impact on the people's life. After all, for the gaining of insights and for intellectual structuring it is absolutely essential to keep a "distanced closeness". Closeness is important in order to comprehend the people's life, thinking and behaviour. Distance, on the other hand, ensures that a status of reflection is maintained. If the distance "dissolves", scientific cognitive interest often vanishes and one finds oneself back in the midst of the people's living environment. The attitude described in the phrases "honest earnestness", "indifferent pleasure" and "distanced closeness" is both useful and effective for the cognitive process of the social scientist within a foreign culture.

\* Why do I travel and/or why am I a social geographer?

At some time or other every traveller is bound to be confronted in communication with those he meets with the question "Why are you on the road?". Such questions arise particularly frequently and insistently when the length of a trip far exceeds the annual leave enjoyed by the average citizen. Unfortunately, I do not have just one single justification to offer for the numerous trips I have made in the last twenty years; rather, I am in what seems a fortunate position in having available a whole series of replies. Whenever my nine year old son asks me "Daddy, why are you always going away?" I tell him the story of a nine year old boy who for his first communion was given a book entitled *With the Vultures* by Karl May. It was not to be the only travel story by this author which the boy would read: he devoured every one of the best-selling Saxon author's travel books - and it did not stay at just one reading. In particular the adventures of Kara Ben Nemsi in Tunis and Damascus and elsewhere in the desert made quite an impression on him. The books became the source of a dream for the boy: to travel, to be on the road, simply to be Kara Ben Nemsi: to feel more at home in a foreign society than the members of that society themselves! This last sentence is recognition in hindsight, to be sure. I believe, however, that I was yearning for exactly that, back then.

I can call on my academic tutor's explanations when discussing with colleagues the reasons for German social geographers working predominantly in foreign countries and overseas. As long as German geography has existed, teachers of academic geography have encouraged young German geographers to win their first scientific spurs abroad. I do not want to go into the object and roots of this tradition here. Thus, it was only natural for me that I, too, should work in a foreign country.

This explanation leads up almost effortlessly to a further response which I do not wish to forget at this point. In Germany (I can only speak for Germany here) becoming a professor of geography can be described as quite an achievement. And it enables one to support a family rather well! And travelling to foreign cultures is indispensable if one wants to become a professor of geography in Germany.

A further reason for my trips should also be, as my academic tutor suggests, the enthusiasm for a sunrise in the high mountains or a day in the tropical rainforest, for the perfectly preserved buildings in the heart of a historical town or for the scenery offered by a classical Mediterranean old town, or for the pulsing, seething life in a metropolis such as Istanbul or Rio de Janeiro.

As I have certain problems with that, I am now compelled to give the real reason: I travel in order to go away. After a certain amount of time in one place, it becomes impossible for me to remain there. I need change in order to be contented. Perhaps it is also a temporary escape. I do not know. I do know, however, that I have to go away in order to be able to return. I also do not know whether I might not just have grown accustomed to this by now and that is why I am doing it. That's how things have developed anyway. Now a stay at home has become a trip, or a trip a stay. I could cite still further reasons for my travels, but I shall leave it at the aforementioned arguments. Although the particular variation I choose depends on context, all my answers, including those I have not mentioned, are completely valid. I conclude (this section) by returning to the question: Why am I a social geographer? So that I have to go away on a lot of trips! Wrong! That is not the

reason I became a social geographer! I wish to spare the reader and myself a reconstruction of this particular section of my life. As a result of chance detours and basic administrative conditions back then I felt absolutely compelled to take up studies in geography! Today, when, with a certain detachment, I consider the reasons for taking up this career, all I can really say is: "It's what the Gods wanted."

\* Partial loss of one's own living environment and detachment from the science community

Very specific effects arise in one's own world when on the road, when away travelling for almost six months of the year for ten to twenty years. I shall leave the question of difficulties with wife and children, if there are any, unconsidered. They are more or less understanding with regard to travel, especially when one is in the position of being able to explain that sojourns abroad of the length indicated are absolutely necessary for a German geographer.

The problem with friends and acquaintances is a different matter altogether. If after turning down the invitation to the wedding, you also turn down the invitation to a garden party and the invitation to the christening of the first-born child, you will receive no more invitations. You are no longer in a position to keep up with the annual pattern of things within your living environment, because of all the travelling and the necessary absences resulting from it. You cannot keep up with your social commitments. And apart from that, none of your friends will accept either the professional necessity or your childlike enthusiasm for your travels. All of a sudden you realize: I am on my own!

Communication with colleagues on any other basis than a scientific one is always difficult. Competition, the way one sees oneself and reality create almost insurmountable barriers. In the world of the scientist it is important to observe rules and...

The arguments I have presented can be condensed into: today I know, as already remarked above, that my demand for the internalization of a scientific stance in regard to the understanding of foreign cultures can lead to problems. One knows the society, one lives in the society, but one has nothing to do with the people's everyday life. One feels one has become a shadow.

Because of the communication and identity problems in the everyday world, in the scientific world and in the world of research one prefers to remain permanently on the road, to travel permanently. In order for this to succeed one becomes a person with many faces. In each context one plays an almost epic figure, in Brecht's sense of the word. One avoids absolute identification, or rather one no longer succeeds at it. Consistency and lack of contradictions, virtually a sacred principle for a scientist of western origin, thus become contextualized and are ultimately abandoned. At this level of reflection and relativity in both the everyday world and in that of science, one cannot be treated "as a human being" in our culture i.e. acknowledged in one's abilities and qualities, because of obvious contradictions the simultaneous is not simultaneous! A revelation on the level I have attempted in this text would and will only create misunderstandings.

**\* Replacement rituals or "My art of travelling"**

My many travels, and above all how I get along with myself on these travels, and the problems cited above as I see them today, led to my developing particular rituals for particular places. The theoretical concept behind my actions, if such a thing ever existed, did not really allow for such conduct to become publicized. As a rule my actions were not

documented. Some few actions were recorded; a written or photographic document resulted either from the meaning or the structural context of the action. This sometimes concerned quite everyday things such as food, clothing and visits for example, but also activities for which locations with a particular landscape were visited. Repetition played an important role in this if I visited or had to visit the sites again.

Many of these activities and actions were carried out by me, for me, and only for me. Some actions took on their own dynamism and became increasingly important; some activities were forgotten. I do not wish to describe the rituals: carrying out activities in particular places, taking up certain positions or reciting particular phrases. Two examples from Morocco can be documented in a fragmentary fashion, since there exist pictures of them: The Jump and The Pose.

The Jump is an - I do not know what -, which has been executed more than ten times, at least - I do not know how often -, over almost the last twenty years, in various years. The location is the "Blue Spring" in Southern Morocco. The Pose is a pause-taking under an archway in Sefrou in Northern Morocco. This "ceremony", too, has been carried out several times in the last ten years. Both actions display a constancy over time and at the same time a (photographic) freezing of the transitional state. Very many thoughts, constructs, experiences and statements, which I do not wish to present here, are connected with these activities. My travel rituals are not meant to be and cannot be described. They are just pictures which should give the observer an impression. The photographs had to be requested both by those involved and by the photographers. These actions have.....

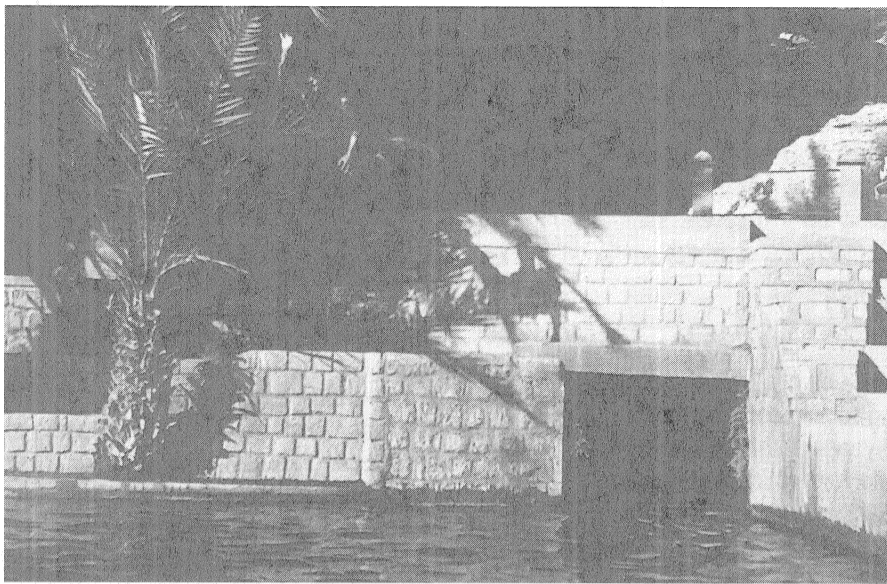
At the Athens Conference, during the discussion about my scientific work, my travels, the reasons for my travels and my "travel rituals" for which I make no artistic claims whatsoever, since for me they are exclusively experienced within the situation itself, I lost the sense of being distanced from the participants as well as from the art objects and regained the possibility for intense communication.

ANTON ΓΙΑΚΟΜΠ ΕΣΣΕΡ

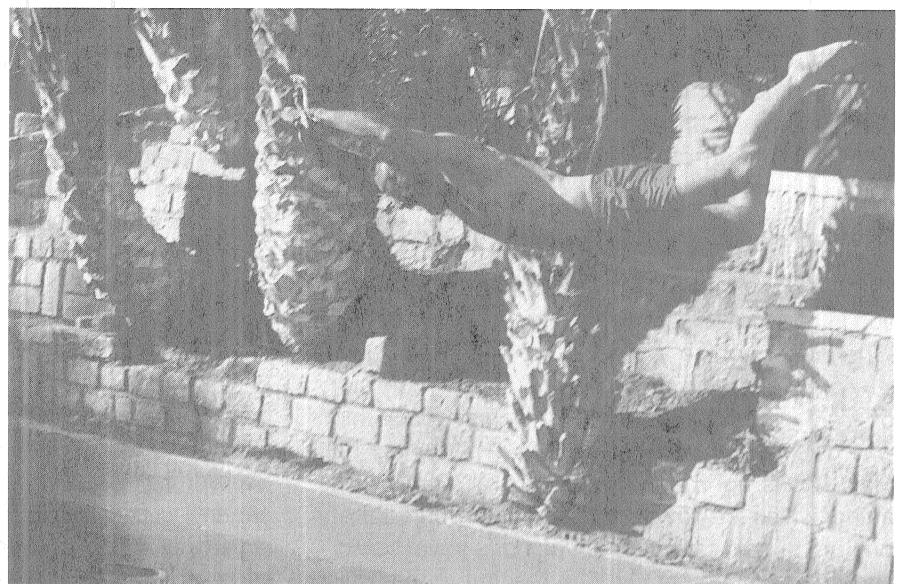
**Ταξιδιωτικές τελετουργίες ενός κοινωνιολόγου**

Ἡ ἐκπαίδευση καὶ ἡ δουλειὰ ἐνὸς ἐπιστήμονα πού ταυτίζεται μὲ τὸ ἀντικείμενό του τὸν κάνει νὰ αἰσθάνεται σταδιακὰ ὄλο καὶ πιο ἀποξενωμένος ἀπὸ τὸν πολιτισμὸ στὸν ὅποιο ἀνήκει. Ἡ ἐμπειρικὴ καὶ ἀναλυτικὴ κατανόηση τῆς ἐπιστήμης στὸ τέλος τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ αἰῶνα ἀπαιτεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν ἐρευνητὴ «ἐπαφὴ ἀπὸ ἀπόσταση», «ἀδιάφορη ἱκανοποίηση», καὶ «στοχαστικὴ ἀπόσταση» ἢ ἀπαιτεῖ «μεθοδικὴ συμμετοχὴ» ἢ «συμμετέχουσα παρατήρηση». Παρόλο πὺ ὁ ἐπιστήμονας εἶναι ἄμεσα συνδεδεμένος μὲ τὴν λειτουργία τοῦ κοινωνικοῦ συστήματος, στὴν πραγματικότητά βρίσκεται σὲ ἓνα μετα-ἐπίπεδο. Ἐπιπλέον ἡ κατάσταση ἀποκτᾷ διαφορετικὴ ποιότητα γιὰ ἓναν ἐπιστήμονα ὅταν -σὲ μιά ξένη χώρα, σὲ ἓναν ξένο πολιτισμὸ- βρίσκεται ἀντιμέτωπος μὲ δύο ἀντίθετους τρόπους ἀντίληψης τῆς πραγματικότητος π.χ. μὲ χειρῶνακτες τεχνίτες καὶ ἐμπόρους στὸ Μαρόκο.

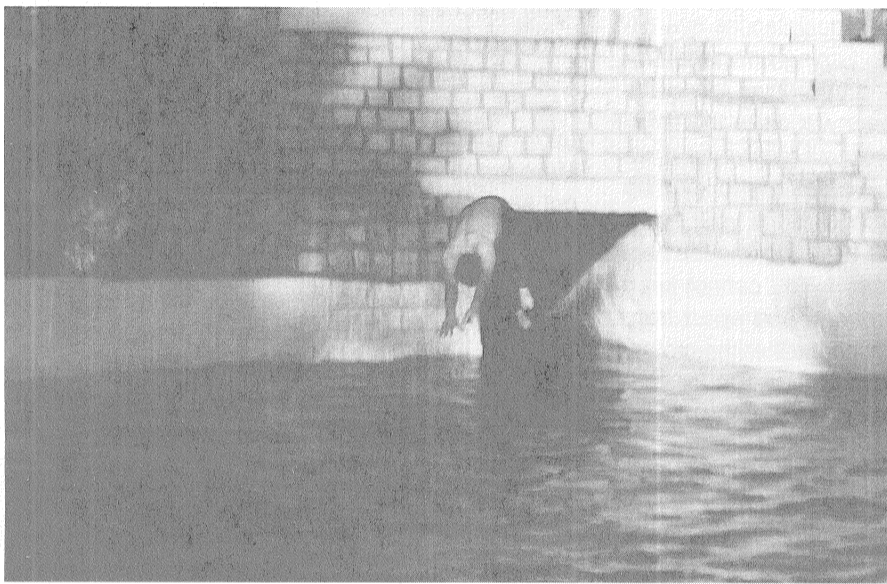
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 Travel rituals of a social scientist



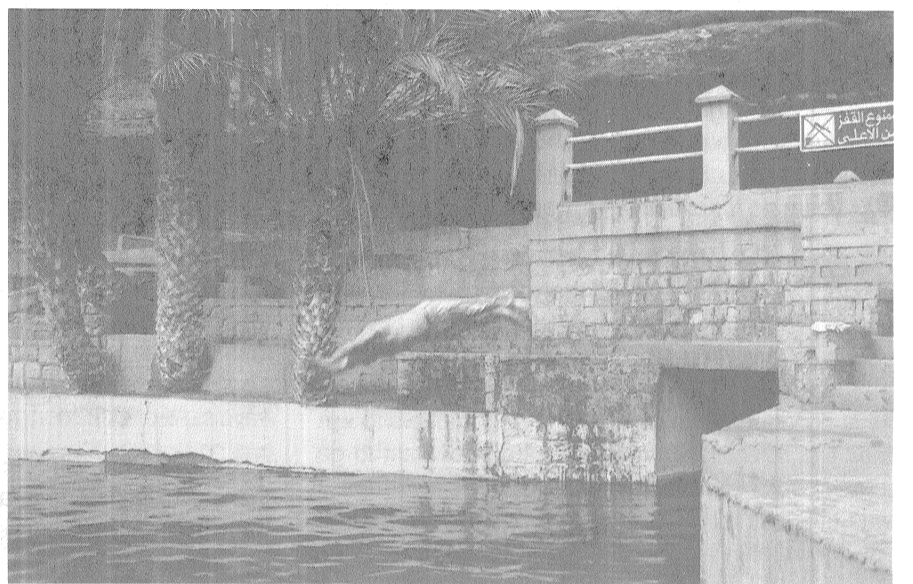
The Jump 1979 (R. Pinl)



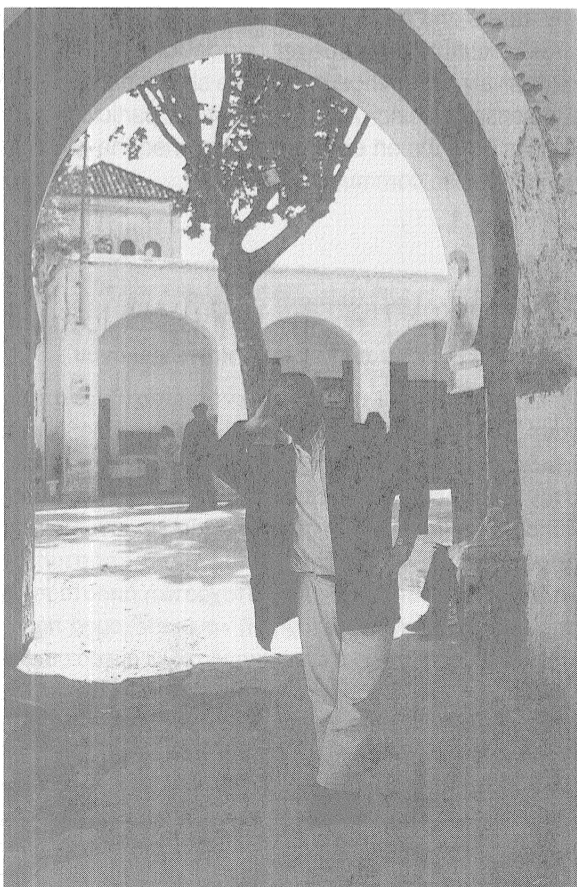
The Jump 1987 (G. Straub)



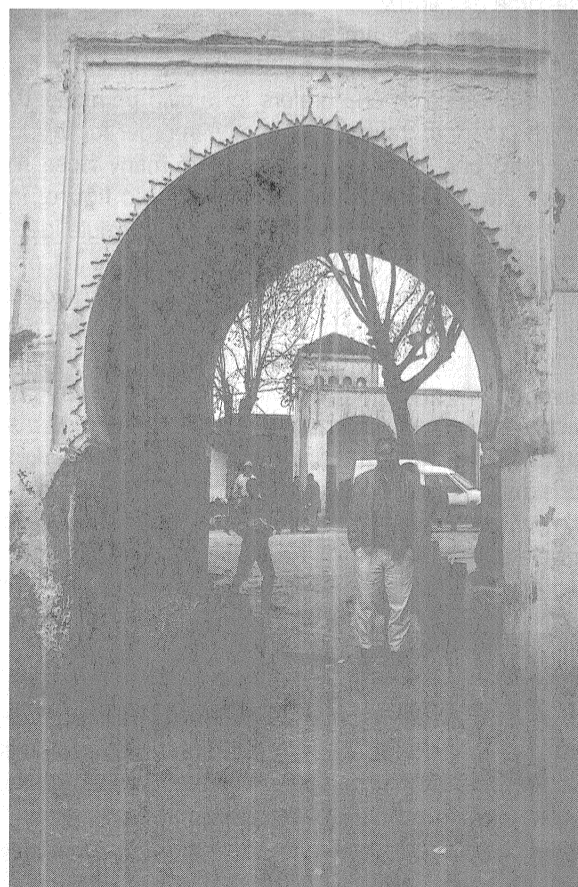
The Jump 1992 (H. Ullmann)



The Jump 1994 (K. R. Wernhart)



The Pose 1996 (F. Meyer)



The Pose (year unknown) (K. H. Lambert)