

# On travel and friendship

Interview with Hans Georg Berger  
by Bianca Laura Petretto

*To look at one of your photographs is almost like starting a journey through another journey. Where is Hans Georg Berger at the present time?*

All civilizations have their concepts of travel: travelling is part of being human. We travel to find a more interesting and more seductive mating partner than those we find in our own vicinity. In doing this we are following a genetic impulse - so much for freedom of choice! We travel to become healthier both in body and mind; we travel to get closer to the divine. The contemporary western idea of travel expresses only a small part of its overall meaning. Other cultures have different concepts and different ways of travelling. The westerner has restricted and stereotyped the idea of travel, though even so, somewhere, deep within us, there is still the memory of the pilgrimage without a particular end in mind, of a departure full of unforeseen risks, of the blind faith in finding unknown sensuality or reaching spiritual salvation. When I was a child, travel for me was pilgrimages to churches and monasteries where there was a different light to the one I saw at home: these were places where the silence was interrupted only by song, they were miraculous places. I lived on the Moselle, between France and Germany, one of the most beautiful parts of Central Europe. My first discoveries, as I wandered around like a solitary vagabond, were the vineyards, the sinuous river, the Roman ruins, the infinite forests of Hunsrück. As an adolescent I escaped from home to go further afield: to Rome, Naples and to the islands in the Baltic Sea. It was as if travelling made the air easier to breathe, the food more tasty, conversations more exciting. I felt much stronger when I was travelling than when I was at home. Since then, I have always taken particular pleasure in "being somewhere else", even though the sedentary life is now beginning to interest me as an idea. If I had not travelled, I would have been a poorer person in soul and spirit. Where am I at the present time? On the road, I hope.

*Your journeys to Egypt, Morocco and Italy have stopped memory, frozen the moment just before something was about to happen. Perhaps waiting for an event?*

The journey to Egypt, together with Herve Guibert, and my various trips to Morocco with Bernard Faucon, helped me to build up confidence, to initiate dialogue and comparison with these two artist friends of mine; they allowed us to "invent" an Egypt and a Morocco that was decidedly our own: parallel universes, often in contrast with „reality“. Christian Caujolle maintains that, in my Egyptian photos of Hervé Guibert, Egypt becomes a sort of theatrical background, a *toile de fond*, against which I develop my interpretation of the other person. Guibert himself has said that my photographs are not portraits but photographic games, fun things that in the end become *jeu de massacre*. My travels in Morocco with Bernard Faucon were a real voyage of discovery: I analysed my friend, complex and unique as he is, just as I did with the landscape of southern Morocco and its people. The event that I am looking for? I imagine that one day a spectator will look at the images, the collection of outlines superimposed. The observer recognises our dialogue, a dialogue between artist-friends, he notices our complicity and enjoys himself as he is joining us, and takes part in it.

Bianca Laura Petretto

## **What remains from art?**

Interview with Hans Georg Berger

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