

The city as a thin line by the sea_Merihaka, Sompasaari

An Exploratory Essay by Alex Arteaga

Merihaka

(1)

A void in front of me. Occasionally enlivened by seagulls.

To the sides, specially on my left side, traffic. The city as a rather homogeneous continuum, with constant micro-variations. A grey ribbon with continuous alterations of tonality inside.

The city as an empty, thin line—a stretched void.

The solid and the liquid touch one another in the air, far away from the zone of their material contact.

City only as machinery—as a mix of mechanical sounds, now also to my right. Powerful, merciless. Autonomous. Detached.

The sea is absent—a non-notorious, insignificant absence. It is not required. It is not needed.

A chance, maybe, to escape, to leave behind the grey, dirty zone. To resignify. To rethink—to begin anew. To conceive a new city—to think the city anew, alternatively, from its void, from its absence, from a radical otherness.

(2)

A void. A place as absence—a surrounded absence. Being here, nothing is here. Nothing happens here but around. Not all around but in some spots around.

An indifferent absence, letting be, letting pass. Almost covered, sometimes. Sometimes, briefly, invaded.

The city is hard, mechanical, grey but airy. Occasionally animated by organic presences that appear and, after a short time, vanish. Presences passing by on the background of a mechanical, grey, continuous going around, going somewhere else.

And in front of me, this other void, a deeper void, a void textured by potential potentialities. A virtually fruitful void. Always far away. Pulling from far away. Inviting me to leave, to leave behind—the dry resonances, even the discreet presences that may recall a certain warmth, even a certain intimacy.

(3)

Machines in action. On different spots. With different sizes, quantities, rhythms, intensities, frequencies.

The sea does not contribute in a significant way to the texture of the city on and as this thin line. Or at least not in a specific way—as sea, not even as a fluid space. It opens a gap, a neutral zone, an empty zone, a distance, a field of distances, a pause.

With the exception of the seagulls—an indirect presence of the sea. They appear as a reminder of the alterity—of the possibility or even the promise of alterity, of a different space (with different rules, with different rhythms, with different textures).

A different space that, nevertheless, can be colonized by the mechanical city—not fully, not continuously. A colonization that can only occasionally, without enduring consequences, be inverted.

A partial, interrupted, fractioned city. A questioned city.

(4)

An empty space. An outside space—outside of activities, of flows taking place somewhere else, not so far away but far enough to not be here, to not belong to this place.

Even those other spaces of activity are partially empty, only active intermittently, allowing the emptiness to extend without limits.

A waiting space? Or rather an abandoned space that gave up any reason for continuing to wait?

A fabulous stage for any tiny event that, suddenly, ends up happening here. A short awakening. A “how would it be if?”—or may be a “how did it use to be?”.

Maybe the thinness of this line only allows for transitory events, for memories or hopes, for impermanences and transits.

(5)

Surrounded by highly distributed, highly heterogeneous activities of highly diverse agents—seagulls, ducks, motors, dogs, humans, wind, sea water. A privileged observatory. A place for distant, maybe even disengaged observation.

Landscapes, waterscapes, soundscapes, humanscapes, seabirdscapes—all coexisting without touching one another.

A spacious liminal spaces-in-between. Transited mainly by wind.

Sitting here, a place too choose between the different sensuous offers—without becoming part of any of them, of anything, always remaining apart, distant, without any control over what appears, intermittently, here (not for me, but here, touching this spot from somewhere else).

Observing here—interweaving isolated presence without producing any fabric.

(6)

A subtle distribution of subtle, mostly mechanical sounds, pushing a bit, sometimes, receding almost immediately.

A sphere, more than a line. The line as a walkway through the sphere—a mostly empty sphere, only minimally demarcated by occasional presences at different distances. A suspended sphere. Bottomless.

A quite habitable in-between—although not inviting you to settle, not even to remain for a long while. Only recognizable as such if you have a compelling reason to be here, to stay here.

Enjoyable, if you like to observe when few things happens—if you enjoy observing for the joy of the action itself not of the observed. If you enjoy small, insignificant events. Or, more precisely, if you enjoy the intervals between events—time frames long enough to forget the possibility of a new event, to give up expectations.

Sompasaari

(1)

City in construction. Behind me. Also on my right.

Heavy machines. Motors. Hard strokes on metal.

In front of me, their absence.

Birds, from time to time. And constantly, continuously, a silence that seems to be listening, to be taking whatever comes, without giving any answer, without reacting.

Birds living there, belonging to this sphere out there, far away, moving far away, taking distance, remaining distant, strange—*fremd*.

Seagulls overflying the thin line, like guardians of a frontier.

The thin line. A question mark. An appeal to decide, to take one side or the other. Instead of coexistence, difference, divergence. A request to make a de-cision.

Dark grey machinery—almost black. Attempting to cover very subtle, occasionally whispering presences—hidden, tiny quasi-ghosts.

Feeling the wind—another guardian.

(2)

Small sounds. Occasional small water sounds. Discreet presences revealing movement—spontaneous, non-intentional movements.

Close sounds. Sound requiring closeness.

Small sounds. Occasional snatches of conversations—disappearing, escaping, tangentially touching this thin line. Like the sounds of small birds. Or, more rarely, dogs.

In contrast, the ever-present grey ribbon of traffic sounds. With slightly fluctuating tonalities and intensities. Static—with movement inside.

The only presence that really touches, discreetly, this line is the water. Touch, here, not like a caress, but rather like a random knocking at a random door—without intending to call attention, to make someone open the door.

The coexistence of a random and uninterested presence—a presence of and even for this place—and the resonance of completely disengaged mobility—looking somewhere else, going somewhere else, without any reference to this thin line.

The possibility of a here, the potentiality of a place given by the presence of water—of moving, touching, knocking water. And the possibility of an anonymous passing by—without entity, without identity. The possibility of (re)thinking the city, of taking a position, a dis-position—to say, for example “rather this (discreet, small, requiring attention, worthy of my attention, of my sensible thinking).”

(3)

Mobility and construction. And the silent presence that comes to be through discrete, subtle alterations on its margins—the margins that touch this thin solid line. Minimal gestures of resistance, maybe. Or, a little more intensively, when the silence is cut by a machine (a boat) and manifests its fluidity—what it can be, how it can behave.

Mobility? A middle-dense, continuous ribbon—middle-light grey, stationary, unceasing, as if it had always been flowing there. A partial background, a layer in, of, and as background. Pure flow.

Construction? Strokes associated, it seems, with intermittent aggressive mechanical presences implying, perhaps, an intention, a goal, a function, thus. Darker, almost black.

(4)

Like a boat in a marina—a small, maybe even partly abandoned marina. More in the nature, today, than in constructed surroundings, a discreet nature—few humans, few seagulls, and the constant, irregular spout of the margins of the sea.

A calm place. A place to be calm, to observe, to enjoy, maybe, the soft and slow flow of time.

No density. No pressure.

Multidimensional openness—of space, of unforeseen although not extraordinary possibilities. A friendly, relaxed openness.

Although machines are there, ready, like animals in their den.

(5)

A corridor for wind—an open-air wind tunnel. Making the sea more present, sweeping away almost any other presence.

A feeling of being exposed—without danger, without losing the protection of a diffuse cocoon.

Transit cutting the sea. Liquified mobility. Machinery enveloped by water. An occasional event that does not alter the wind-dominated calmness.

Discreet, occasional animal presence on the margins—humans talking, seagulls and other sea birds chirping and squawking

A place to pass by, to become briefly present and vanish. It is not a place to stage yourself, to play urban games of self-staging

Wind and water, to a lesser extent, are the protagonists.

You might be welcome, but the place is indifferent to your occasional, minimal presence. This place doesn't need you. It flows, constantly, without you, without anyone.

The possibility of becoming anonymous—an anonymous provisional wanderer.

(6)

The margins of the sea spouting against the multilayered mechanical sounds. Seabirds celebrating the contact.

Two (main) textures encountering one another but never mixing with each other. The thin line as a non-porous membrane. A thin sheet allowing for contact but not for exchange—this or that, even either this or that.

The city, thus, as two-sided boundary, as a double-sided surface of reciprocally indifferent touch—uninterested, tolerated touch.

Without the need for deciding, for taking a position for the one or the other. Rather, temporarily inhabiting an indissoluble duality. This and that—simply, without any need for development.