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Abstract

Notions of the City; Notes on Place is a poetic exercise on experiencing the city and events in it. The work questions ways of behaving, interacting and perceiving the everyday view that is often called mundane and introduces alternative approaches to the city, ways of challenging ones own experience in familiar surroundings.

The thesis presents notions and notes from an individual point of view but also presents works by different artists that have approached the common, public space.

The work consists of three parts, the first one being the literary part which opens the background of the work as to *how* and *why* and presents also the final two parts that can and should be perceived individually.

The second part is a field-test performed by the author where he introduces a method of observation, a way of experiencing any single chosen place by anyone, anytime, in order to find new perspective. The method requires physical presence by the executioner where he makes notes of everything he sees. The field-test is presented in the form of a book that also includes photographs alongside the notes.

The final part of the work is an exhibition of the photographs made specially for Bang Bang gallery, which is a part of the Aalto EE program. The exhibition consists of nine pictures selected from the thirteen portrayed in the book.

Keywords City, experience, observation, everyday, field-test, photograph

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Tiivistelmä

Notions of the City; Notes on a Place on poeettinen, pohdiskeleva tutkielma kaupunkitilasta ja sen kokemisesta. Työ tarkastelee kirjoittajan katsomistapaa ja kokemuksellisuutta kaupungissa ja yrittää sitä kautta saada selkeyttä ympäröivään tilaan, mutta myös pohtia laajemmin kaupungin toimivuutta ihmisten, tekojen ja tilojen kautta. Tutkielma etsii mahdollisuuksia uusiin lähestymistapoihin kokea ympäristöämme ja tapahtumia siinä.

Notions of the City; Notes on a Place koostuu kirjallisesta osuudesta, kirjan muodossa esitettävästä kenttäkokeesta ja valokuvanäyttelystä.

Kirjallinen osio koostuu tekijän omista pohdinnoista ja johtopäätöksistä, toisten taiteilijoiden teosten esittelystä, kenttäkokeen muistiinpanoista ja eri puolilla kaupunkia otetuista valokuvista.

Kenttäkoe käsittää kirjoittajan kahden päivän aikana tekemät huomiot tietystä paikasta tiettyinä aikana. Kokeen lopullinen muoto on fyysinen kirja, joka pitää sisältää muistiinpanot kaikesta mitä tekijä huomioi ympärillään sekä valokuvia, joissa kaupunki esittäytyy etäännettynä, abstrahoituna.

Teoksen valokuvat ovat myös esillä näyttelynä Aalto EE:n Bang Bang galleriassa kauppakorkeakoulun tiloissa syksyllä 2015. Näyttely koostuu yhdeksästä teoksesta, jotka on valittu kirjassa olevista kolmestatoista kuvasta.

NOTIONS OF THE CITY; NOTES ON A PLACE

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Introduction.

My work *Notions of the City; Notes on a Place* consists of observations and thoughts about the city thru the eyes of one protagonist, me. I try to question and challenge my ways of seeing and experiencing my immediate surroundings, the city I live in. I want to break my everyday patterns. To avoid the obvious route from one place to another. To pay attention and give weight to the seemingly meaningless. To see what I have missed. To wonder at the behaviour of fellow citizens as well as my own. The aim is to take hold of my surroundings, to step out and see instead of looking.

In the course of the work, I will try to examine the streets, buildings, addresses and people without dissecting the city too much – for it is to be experienced as a whole. Everything affects everything. My approach is a poetic one with intent to produce distortions of the obvious, to ponder how I perceive the city, the people, and the interaction between the two. I also review how different artists have explored the city.

In the work, I take liberties in order not to restrict my observations and thoughts. To not limit personal decision making and the approach to the subject; the city and its people. I want to let the work evolve at its own pace. I want to plunge into the experience with a certain kind of recklessness, without preliminary conclusions, in order to bend the grids of seeing and evaluating the everyday scene around us. The work has inconsistencies, but so does the object under examination. While the city is open, it is at the same time a closed space through prohibited places. Entrance to a majority of places is blocked by gates, locks, codes. I will try not to generalise, but at the same time, I am bound to do just that. At the expense of the reader not being able to identify with my notions, I will do everything in my power to stay true to myself and my thoughts.

During the course of this work, my opinions will change, have their limitations, and be insufficient, for encounters are always obscure and vaguely interpreted. Experiences and interpretations vary, and my notions are merely fragments of a certain time and place, bound to change later on. It would be impossible to make permanent assumptions in a vast, chaotic, constantly changing scene. These are my encounters in, with, and about the city from an objective point of view. Hopefully there will be the element of surprise. I will jump regardless of how I land. Richness is in the possibility of failure, in trial and error. Creative uncertainty determines the work. The search comes before the arrival. This is a narrow perspective on the city, but it is solely mine. I agree to disagree because I am 100% unsure.

Enter
Observe
Notice
See
Note
Perceive
Detect
Spot
Behold
Exit

A man leaves his apartment, walks down two flights of stairs – 37 steps – and enters the street. He turns left around the corner and gets lost.

The City and the Streets.

THE CITY

“A place where people live that is larger or more important than a town: an area where many people live and work.”¹

The city is a monument for thousands of experiences, a space for entrances and exits. We arrive and depart. Everything is built for people; buildings to occupy, streets to roam, services to utilise. I try to make sense of the city, but everything is in a constant state of change. Nothing is permanent; the streets disappear behind you as you go, buildings evaporate, what is there is not there. The city is a unit, but it presents itself in scattered parts. When is the city complete, the buildings built, the streets paved?

The city is a series of events, experiences, and given structures to comprehend and to process; an entirety that one has to decipher over and over again, a place one needs to construct for oneself. We see, hear, feel, interact and think, everywhere and all the time, so we constantly give meaning to our surroundings, or re-define them. Where we are is always the centre of existence, thus the centre of a place. This is mental real-estate.

We not only live in a place, but we live the place by continually adding meaning and experiences to it. Places become emotional spaces. Senses are the tools by which we try to understand the space. But as we try to define places, they also define us. Senses, memories, and identities shape the city and vice versa. You alter the space by being there, and the space alters you. There is a constant quest for balance. The city changes and people adapt to the transformation.

Our identity is determined by where we live, interact, and aim our perceptions. Without knowing where we come from and where we are now, we would not know who we are. Everyday, mundane experience reveals our identity.

¹ Merriam-Webster dictionary

We need to have affection for the city, for the rented rooms, faces passing by, and the symmetry of the streets, for time passes through this place. We need to find shelter, a home, a heart in the body of the city. A place to roam from and to return to.

“In the same way that the heart does not care which life it beats for, the city does not care who fulfils its various functions. When everyone who moves around the city today is dead, in a hundred and fifty years, say, the sound of people’s comings and goings, following the same old patterns, will still ring out. The only new thing will be the faces of those who perform these functions, although not that new because they will resemble us.”²

We are part of the furniture, someday outdated.

What can be removed from the city, taken out of the equation without changing the city from what it is? If the buildings moved half an inch per day, how long would it take for us to notice? Would anything be out of place? If the buildings collapsed to be built again, would the new map of the city look different?

Given structures and grids guide us through the city, make us move accordingly. Obstacles and boundaries are set to prohibit our movement and entrance into places. Main streets overshadow the back-alleys, and courtyards behind closed gates are hidden from passing eyes. Thread-like streets run to the ever expanding shoreline of the city. What at one point vanishes across the horizon later reappears. People are the weight holding buildings to the ground. The sounds of the city – cars, trams, construction sites – penetrate the walls and only the absence of these sounds makes us listen.

The city yells: “I am large, I contain multitudes.”³

An urban landscape full of vertical and horizontal surfaces, hooded buildings and rooftops reach staggering heights where they fold away, people occupy every street with a bounding pulse. The city is numerous variations of itself, consisting of cube-like cages – apartments, confined spaces – but also vast areas of space, streets and parks. The city is a facade. Walls in front of walls. Corners of buildings towards each other, unmoved, reassuring us of the paths they form. But the walls end, if they ever existed.

“Walls always have two sides, each often very different from the other whether those sides be internal, external, either, or both. These variable aspects have something of the gestalt about them as we cannot see both sides at the same time the qualities of neither side can ameliorate the other, a schizophrenic quality that imbues them with a certain element of mystery. The fact that we usually take walls for granted is a given – little about walls occupies our attention let alone surprises us”⁴

The city never leaves you on your own, turns its back on you.

² Knausgaard 2013, 174

³ Whitman 2008, section 51

⁴ Exley 2012

ROAMING THE STREETS

“A road in a city or town that has houses or other buildings on one or both sides”¹

“Observe the street, from time to time, with some concern for system perhaps. Apply yourself. Take your time..... Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on. Do you know how to see what’s worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you? Nothing strikes you. You don’t know how to see.”²

We stand in tension two meters apart from each other waiting for the light to change, like a herd waiting to disperse, mimes ready for synchronized walking. Movement creates movement, people pave way for others, make invisible passages in the air, create a maze of paths. The streets belong to everyone. Every street has to have a name, a beginning and an end. Rules apply to movement in the streets. Some rules are unwritten but we follow them anyway.

Cross the street where designated.
Stop when the light is red.
Move when the light is green.
Go to the back of the line.
Move along.
Stay on the right.
Pass from the left.
Keep your distance.
Walk casual.
Keep pace.
Pretend to be determined.
Avoid contact.
Look down.
Stay silent.
Stand in queues.
No public loitering.
Keep your eyes on the lights!

Maps and names of streets define where we are and depict places outside of us. They indicate relations between places and assure us of our existence. They show a place to come from and a place to go. They give us a place that can be folded open and laid out. They show us where to send postcards from. Who draws the maps, names the streets after presidents or some foreign place? Why is a street in Helsinki named Cairo St.?

What if there were no maps, addresses, coordinates, names of locations? Where would we be; nowhere? Would we tell someone our location by saying, “I’m near a tree, next to a building.”? Or if we could name the streets for ourselves,

¹ Merriam-Webster dictionary

² Perec 2008, 50

define and refer to a place by another name, what would the names be? Something based on personal attachment to the place, giving the place a mental address, or something describing the visual appearance of it? What would be an accurate enough description of a place? Where are the borders, the end of maps? How can one be off the map? Are there any uncharted areas left to explore?

We repeatedly go by the same routes in the city, like a dog tied to a pole. As the dog runs around the pole it creates a path, but once the leash gets tangled, the path begins to narrow. Movement decreases until there is none. Through repetition the cityscape becomes only a background, details get lost.

A **Flâneur** is a person who wanders the streets in an undetermined manner without purpose or destination. Casually walking and experiencing streets, parks, cafes. Being on an excursion everywhere. Truly being in the moment. Open and responding without any expectations. Individual, still part of the crowd but not suppressed by it. Walter Benjamin, for example, took long urban walks, using the act of strolling as an analytic tool for observing, but also as a lifestyle. In photography, a street photographer could be seen as a Flâneur, wandering the streets observing without expectations, and as a reflection of the crowd's behavior.

"The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world "picturesque".³

Finnish architect and writer Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that the invention of photography and the printed image has changed our approach to the visible, "the camera has become the prime instrument of tourism." We see our surroundings as images more than places of experience and participation. We have a need to visualize everything, to have control over it. The city before us is a sum of all the cities we have seen before, an archive of locations, a personal library. Pallasmaa quotes writer Susan Sontag, "...reality has come to seem more and more like what we are shown by cameras."⁴ We are participating in an act of voyeurism, looking at things from a distance. Cities seen in pictures give the feeling of a visited one.

"Photography has become one of the principal devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation."⁵

Images make up the world. We believe places to be as we've seen them or as they have been presented to us. Can anything really be seen for the first time without attaching the past to it? What we see is the result of millions of repeated images representing `reality`. The map is not the territory is a concept by philosopher Alfred Korzybski wherein he states that models of reality such as beliefs are not reality itself. Reality exists outside our mind, but we can construct models of this `territory` based on what we glimpse through our senses, primarily by visual stimulus. Experiences are not physical.

3 Sontag 2005, 42-43

4 Pallasmaa 2005, 143

5 Sontag 2005, 16

“A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir.”⁶

“The visual city leaves us as outsiders, voyeuristic spectators, and momentary visitors, incapable of participation”⁷

Every interpretation of space is uniquely affected by our beliefs, memories, and experiences even if the surroundings are the same for all. Karjalainen says “when places stay in our memories, and as no one can have the same memories therefore same kind of places cannot exist.”⁸ We build places and spaces in our minds over and over again according to our experiences. As memories and experiences change, so does the view of the city. We are engaged in a constant reconstruction, like building sites taking over space; the city is never done. We are positioned between `reality` and the imagined. There is a view and there is an interpretation. Every one of them unique.

“I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the façade of the cathedral, where it roams over the moldings, and contours, sensing the sizes of recesses and projections; my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door and my hand grabs the door pull. As I enter the dark void behind. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience.”⁹

I personally feel uncertainty when entering a new space. I have a need for immediate understanding of the place, but preset assumptions and built expectations are never met, imagined scenarios are inaccurate. There is a sense of disappointment for a short moment because every place has a voice of it’s own.

How many pictures of tourist attractions do we have to take before they’re worn out?

There is a constant anticipation that the city will make an impression, break our boredom. We are no longer surprised. An incident occurs and it is nothing.

⁶ Sontag 2005, 15

⁷ Pallasmaa 2005, 143

⁸ Karjalainen 2006,

⁹ Pallasmaa 2012, 40

Artistic Approach.

PREFACE

The city is an endless source of material for artistic endeavours. In this chapter, I introduce three different approaches from three different artists, to alter, wander, and observe the city and its residents by means of contemporary art. Although one of the artworks does not originally take place in the city, it demonstrates a method that could be applied to the city as well. These performances or art pieces try to break the `normal` ways of utilising common space and can be repeated by anyone with the outcome being different every time.

To explore, infiltrate, follow, to leave a mark, to move by rules and break them, to interact.

SUITE VÉNITIENNE (1979)

Suite Vénitienne is a conceptual piece consisting of photographs and text, in which Sophie Calle details how she followed a man she had met at a party in Paris. Disguised she trailed him, recording his movements as 'they' took a trip to Venice. During the course of the 'performance' Calle phoned dozens of hotels to find out where the man was staying and persuaded a woman living across from the hotel room to allow her to photograph the man leaving and returning.

This piece was something of a breakthrough for Calle's work at the time, which had previously recorded her following strangers around Paris, employing various methods of surveillance to construct identities for them. During the process of monitoring a person, one unavoidably forms opinions, makes assumptions, and builds an identity for the person based on his or her actions. This formed identity may be shaped by merely coincidental incidents, random acts and encounters, and the performance tells more about the implementer than the object.

In the work, Calle becomes somewhat invisible in the surroundings. She keeps her distance, trying to avoid being revealed. She "...leaves no traces as she follows him: She has lost herself in the other's traces. But she steals his traces. She photographs him. She photographs him continuously. Here the photography does not have the voyeur's or archivist's perverse function. It simply says: Here, at that time, at that place, in that light, there was someone."¹

The work raises questions about privacy in public space. Was the work an invasion of privacy? Is the followed person victimized and could there be consequences? Where does the line between acceptable behaviour in public and the act of breaking individual boundaries go? The knowledge of being under constant surveillance would certainly make one aware of his own behaviour and he would act accordingly.

"The street is a stage, and the sense that an audience is watching pervades the gestures and movements of the players in it."²

Suite Vénitienne was a game where the 'opponent' did not know they were playing, or more specifically, did not know he was a part of a game, a pawn in one.

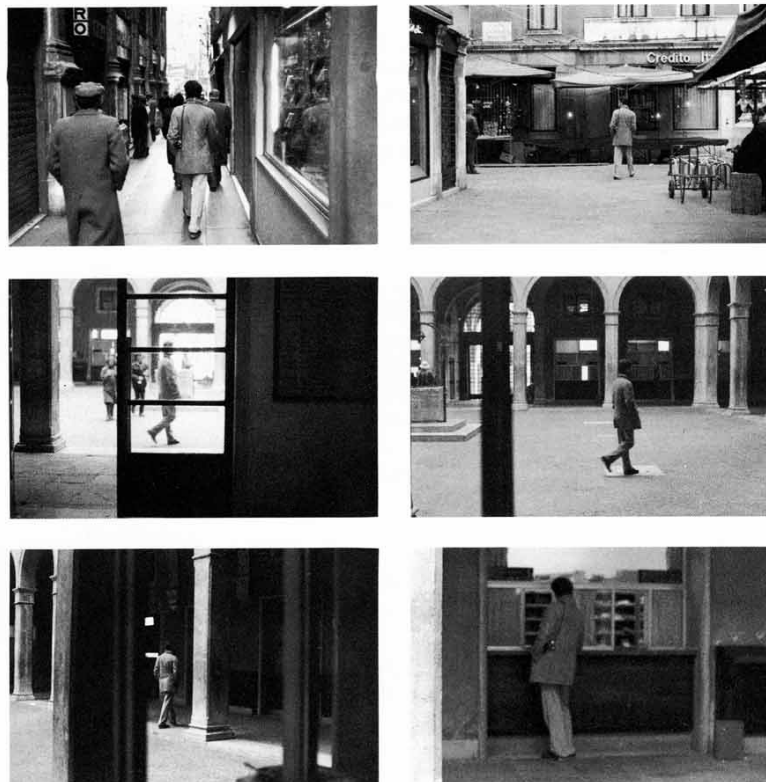
Suite Vénitienne resembles American performance and installation artist Vito Acconci's work *Following Piece* from 1969 in which he followed a random person in the streets of New York until they ended up in a private space. In an interview from 2013, Calle stated that due to Acconci's work, "I'm no longer scared of doing the same thing as anyone else. In any case, everyone has the same ideas anyway." Concerning the act of repetition, Calle stated, "Vito Acconci told me that my project had nothing to do with his, that we weren't following people for the same reasons. The purpose of our projects was different, the motives too."

¹Baudrillard 1988, 78

²Whyte 2009, 21

Following people is something detectives do on a daily basis. Jealous lovers do it too. Following is an act that belongs to the entire world. When someone tells me that someone else has already done what I'm doing it doesn't bother me, because I have my own creative vocabulary, my own means of expression."³

Her notes on *Suite Vénitienne* were later published alongside an essay by Jean Baudrillard entitled *Please Follow me* (1988)."



Sophie Calle, Suite Vénitienne, 1979

THE SHADOW (1981)

A few years after *Suite Vénitienne* Sophie Calle requested that her mother arrange for a private detective to follow her and report on her daily movements. She also wanted to have a memento of the person following her, and randomly picked a day for a friend to follow and take pictures and notes of both her and anyone else who seemed to be following her. This time the game had three players, one of which didn't know all rules of the game.

The work was, in Calle's words, an attempt "to provide photographic evidence of my own existence." Calle proceeded to lead the unwitting detective around parts of Paris that were particularly important for her, thereby reversing the expected position of the observed subject. At some point she became aware of her follower. Calle also wrote a journal throughout the day describing places and events. Later, her and the detective's notes could be compared. Such projects, with their suggestions of intimacy, also questioned the role of the spectator—with viewers often feeling a sense of unease as they became the unwitting collaborators in these violations of privacy. Moreover, the deliberately constructed, and thus in one sense artificial, nature of the documentary 'evidence' used in Calle's work questioned the nature of 'truth'.

The resultant work, *The Shadow*, shows the surveillance notes and photographs by the detective—and of the detective collected by the friend, but also photographs and descriptions by Calle of the experience of being watched once she recognised she was being trailed.

Extract from the detective's notes:

At 10:20 the subject leaves home. She is dressed in a gray raincoat, gray trousers, and wears black shoes with stocking of the same color. She carries a yellow shoulder bag.

At 10:23 the subject buys some daffodils at the florist's on the corner of rue Froidevaux and rue Gassed, then enters Montparnasse cemetery at 5 rue Emile-Richard. She lays the flowers on a tomb then leaves the cemetery on the boulevard Edgar-Quinet side.

At 10:37 the subject buys a newspaper from the stand at 202 boulevard Raspail.

At 10:40 she enters 100 boulevard Montparnasse.

Notes from *The Shadow* resemble Georges Perec's in *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, the main difference being the target of observation and the location. Perec observes random people in a predetermined place while Calle turns the attention to a single selected person in a variety of places. Comparison between the notes reveals an identical form of showing exact times and descriptions of actions taking place.

I feel that in Calle's work the idea itself is the artwork. The execution and outcome of the act is less relevant than the concept. The process itself may be more rewarding for the person carrying it out than for the viewer of later documentations.

Prior to learning of Calle's work, I had a few times selected a random person on the street and followed him or her for as long as possible. The purpose was to let someone else guide my way and to see how different of an experience it would be to move in a certain place at a certain time as someone else would. Most of these attempts have ended fairly soon, in less than an hour with the person disappearing into a crowd (due to poor surveillance) or entering a restricted area such as a locked building.

Nevertheless, I have had an opportunity to trace another person's path in the city even for a short while. Does the act of following strangers happen more than we are aware?



Sophie Calle, The Shadow, 1981

A LINE MADE BY WALKING (1967)

In 1967, Richard Long did a performance in which he altered a place, turned it into an object. He found a featureless field in the countryside about twenty miles from London in which he then walked back and forth in a straight line through the grass. The line was photographed as the sun made it visible and later exhibited as a photograph of the physical intervention. The trampled line later disappeared as grass grew back and covered the path.

“...straight line in a grass field, which was also my own path, going ‘nowhere’.”
-Richard Long¹

With his performance, or sculpture if you may, he left his mark, although for a limited period of time. He occupied a place and made it his own. The simple and prosaic action of intervention would have probably gone unnoticed without the documentation of the work. But if someone had come across the path, would they have given a second thought as to why was the line there? Why was the line here and who made it?

Why Long chose to do the piece in the countryside, in a desolated spot, I do not know. But I imagine he wanted to leave a mark in a place uninhabited by people. This way Long had an impact ‘nowhere’ as he put it, but if the work had been done in a crowded city, the message would have concerned individuality in relation to other people. One person would have rose out of the mass. Perhaps in the duration of walking, which probably took quite a while, Long became very familiar with the location. He must have known every bush and tree at the far ends of the line, every plant in the vicinity of the line. Maybe years after, if returning to the field, he could still remember the exact spot of the line.

Although Long did his work outside the city, in a grass field, the method could have been and is done in the city all the time. These ‘desire paths’, where people knowingly or unknowingly walk, trampling paths into places where they are not intended to be, appear frequently. We alter routes between places according to our own will, not by following given paths. The view changes by physicality, unconscious practice.

I wonder how much Long thought of the visual presentation, the photograph, beforehand? Did he choose the form of a straight line as it would be clearer to see and record? Another way of going about the performance could have been by picking random targets around the field, trees and rocks at the corners and to have walked lines between them. The lines would have eventually crossed each other and made less controlled formations.

¹ Tufnell 2007, 39



A LINE MADE BY WALKING
ENGLAND 1967

DRIFTING FOR AN HOUR IN ORLÉANS-LA-SOURCE (2004)

Wilfried Hou Je Bek, a writer and a psycho-geographer from the Netherlands, uses the concept of drifting according to preset algorithms in order to explore the city in a non-intuitive manner. This way the participants obtain new ways of exploring their surroundings.

In 2004 Hou Je Bek gathered twenty people in Orléans-La-Source in order to take them for a walk. He gave them a pencil, a small yellow card, and a black and white map of the neighborhood. The yellow card had a “walking algorithm” for the participants to follow for an hour. On the card was a four item list of instructions:

First right
First left
First right
Repeat.

The participants were to write down a name of their own invention every time they saw something striking - an object, a street corner, etc. A name that reflected the impression derived from a place or phenomenon. The names turned out to be descriptions, sentences, phrases such as “ I arrive in a immense open space, a vacant lot divided in two: parking lot/basketball court. Around this space, buildings and iron bars. What urban developers call a *délaissé* (abandon) appears at the heart of another kind of abandon we don’t usually name.”¹

The naming method created a personal relationship with the objects, the places no longer had a previously determined quality to them. “...gutless administrative ones estrange people from the world they live in.” Hou Je Bek p5.

Names tell us where we are and the beliefs incorporated to these names and places define our mental approach to the place.

But at the expense of personal sentiments as if there were no uncharted territories to explore, it has already been done for you.

¹ O’rourke 2013, 5

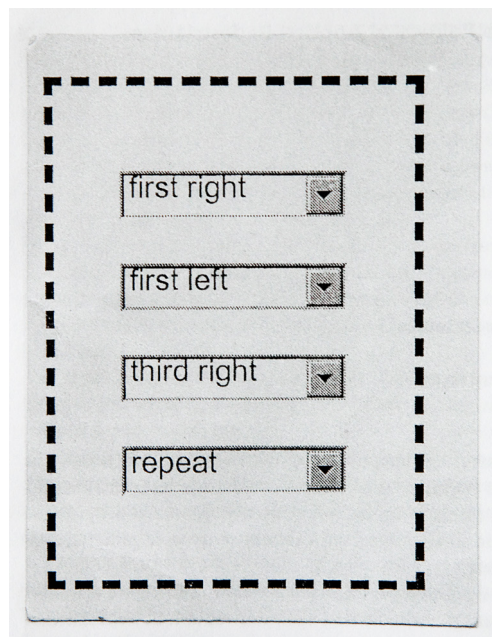
After one hour, the participants gathered together, and the maps and notes were collected. The notations were later translated into a language created by Hou Je Bek called L-Expression and visualized in a three-dimensional display. Unfortunately, I could not find these visualizations, but I feel that the experiences and realizations of the individuals taking part was of main importance. Personal experience is something that cannot be put on display.

“Psychogeography is the fact that you have an opinion about a space the moment you step into it.”²

How often do we form an opinion of a place beforehand, what the streets, people, hotel rooms look like? We visualize places and our movement there, but how often is that presumption accurate? We rely on and apply previous knowledge and assumptions.

“We see only what we expect to see. It takes a certain detachment to be able to look for one thing and find another fortuitously.”³

By writing down one’s observations and sensations, do they become more real?
If a thing is not said out loud, did it take place at all?
Is it easier to assess one’s own movement and the principals of observation when making physical evidence of it?



Hou Je Bek, Walk, 2003

² O'Rourke 2013, 5

³ O'Rourke 2013, 5

NOTES ON A PLACE.

THE PREMISE

During the summer of 2014, I came across a book by French novelist Georges Perec entitled *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. In October of 1974, Perec embarked on a quest to see “what happens when nothing happens.” He spent three days in the proximity of Saint-Sulpice, Paris and described things of no importance. He would write down in a straight forward, laconic manner all the things that caught his eye.

Perec’s method intrigued me and seemed an ideal way to study the patterns of my own perception. Even though my effort was to be a repetition, I knew that the outcome would be different from Perec’s as the result changes dependent on protagonist, time or a place. Of course reading Perec’s book affected hugely the way I went about the field-test.

In his book *Place and Intimate Sensing*, Finnish writer Pauli Tapani Karjalainen introduces the term ‘remote sensing’ which is, Karjalainen quotes: “the examination of, the obtaining of information about, an object or phenomenon at a distance from it, without physical contact with it.”¹ This was to be my approach to the test.

On the 5th of September 2014, almost 40 years after Perec, I set out to re-enact his endeavour for two days in Töölö, Helsinki. My aim was to pay attention to the very mundane and seemingly meaningless and to obtain new perspective on a previously known place by forcing myself to stay still and only observe. Why? In hope of increasing comprehension of my surroundings. The questions raised in my mind concerned what catches our attention and what escapes it. What are the things that happen daily, the mundane that we ignore, things we let flow by? What is significant, meaningful?

¹ *Porteous* 1986, 250

The location of my I Spy-like excursion was near Töölö Market Square at the intersection of Runeberg St. and Topelius St. I would sit for two days, a Friday and a Saturday, on the steps of a nearby school facing the market square and write down my observations meticulously. I knew the place beforehand, having walked past it almost daily, but I felt I had never truly looked beyond the obvious, or more: I had never looked at the obvious.

What is meaningful in a certain place at a specific time? What is worth seeing and why?

GPS coordinates to my location: Latitude: 60.179728, Longitude: 24.922731.

THE DAYS

DAY 1.

Date: 5th of September 2014, a Friday

Time: 10:25 a.m.

Location: Töölö Square, Helsinki

Weather: Sunny, a clear blue sky

After several cloudy days, the sun is shining, casting hard shadows. The buildings, trees, and people passing by appear as silhouettes. The sun reflects brightly via windows, creating beams of light.

A construction site is making a lot of noise. The buildings are covered up in white tarpaulin.

There are traffic lights in front of me. And three big trees that cover part of the sky.

Tram 8 goes by. It runs between Jätkäsaari and Arabia. On its route there are 26 stops and here is one of them.

There are cars going past me in a traffic roundabout, a cross section to five directions.

I see eleven traffic light poles, six pedestrian crossings, and 12 trees.

I see a pharmacy, a restaurant, a café, a women's clothing store, and a kitchen supplies store.

Tram 2 goes by. It runs between Olympiaterminaali and Nordenskiöldinkatu. Its route consists of 21 stops.

There is a marketplace on the opposite side of the square with coffee stands and vegetable sellers.

A woman is walking a dog that clearly needs grooming.

Bus 42 goes by and a passenger notices me.

Four white cars in a row go by.

Tram 8 goes by.

I feel it's hard to concentrate. I feel anxiety.

A beggar is sitting in front of the pharmacy across the street. The sun is shining on her while my location is in the shadow of a tree.

An elderly man walks by wearing clothes appropriate to men thirty years younger than him.

Tram 8 goes by.

There are black, grey, yellow, red, orange, and white marquis scattered around the square.

Tram 2 goes by.

Cars are going in all directions.

Bus 45 goes by.

A taxi stand is located on the other side of the square.

A girl with sunglasses appears from behind the corner and gives me a glance.

Tram 2 goes by.

An elderly woman is waiting at the traffic lights, holding onto a pole. No one seems to do that, take hold of things around them.

A pregnant woman goes by.

A young woman who doesn't seem comfortable with her high heels.

I light a cigarette.

There is a sudden pause; no cars, trams, or people.

Tram 8 goes by.

I can see the orange tents of the marketplace cafes.

Is this all completely mundane information with no value at all?

Bus 45 goes by.

A boy wearing a Hawaiian shirt walks past me.

Three people standing at the traffic lights, a man, a woman, and a young Japanese girl, keep a safe distance from each other.

The beggar is looking at me. What does she see from her position?

A lady is wearing an orange coat that matches the color of a real estate company's car behind her.

Ten silver colored cars drive by.

Tram 8 goes by.

I count 28 metal poles of lights, signs, and electricity in my sight.

A man goes past me for the third time.

An Indian man goes by.

The cash machine gathers people together.

Traffic signs are pointing everywhere but up and down.

A girl with a backpack is running across the street. I lose sight of her behind parked cars.

The construction site sound recalls a running vacuum cleaner.

People from the tram stand in a herd at the lights, dispersing only when the light changes. I can count five of them looking at me.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by. No one looks happy riding on the bus.

All these people and I'm the only one observing others.

A man with pink pants goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

The beggar extends her cup to a lady who ignores her.

A green building.

A light brown building.

A red building.

A grey building.

Construction site workers are eating at the fast food stall at the side of the marketplace.

A skinny girl is wearing a pink sweater.

An empty coffee cup is next to me on the ground.

There is a pause in traffic.

Tram 2 goes by.

The sun is hitting me, casting a shadow of my hand while writing.

An ambulance is driving by. The bright color of the car matches the color of the pharmacy sign.

Bus 41 goes by.

A girl texting a message glances at me.

Tram 8 goes by.

My back is starting to hurt. This location is not for sitting for long periods of time. What is it for?

I start to notice more similar colors repeating in the view.

Two pink shirts in a row. Is pink fashionable at the moment? I once heard that the reason why in some countries most of the houses are turquoise is because it's the cheapest color.

A BMW has pulled over at the pharmacy even though it's not allowed to park there.

Another person with a pink shirt goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Another pink shirt goes by, a brighter one than the one before.

Another 8 goes by.

A lot of people are listening to music.

A girl in a pink shirt is very skinny, anorexic maybe.

A car is honking its horn.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 205 is nearly empty. Maybe at this time of the day most people are where they are supposed to be.

There are steps going up on the left of me and a wall on the right. The concrete walls obstruct my view, which is about 140 degrees.

The BMW is gone. I missed the driver.

I get up and stretch my back.

Bus 39 goes by.

The beggar is looking at her hands.

11:23

A man is running against red lights.

No one is crossing the roundabout how they please but rather by following the given paths.

A woman is running, in a pink shirt of course.

A green pharmacy plastic bag floats in the air next to an orange car.

Tram 8 goes by.

I'm waiting for something significant to happen.

A bald postman goes by.

A girl that resembles my ex goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

People's shadows are intertwining.

A man with a wristband drives by.

The beggar appears to be sleeping in a sitting position.

A burka wearing woman goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A security company car goes by.

A no entry sign guides drivers where to go and where not to.

Another bus 14 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

A longhaired girl is running.

Bus 45 goes by.

Trying to think of objects to photograph. What is interesting and what is not.

An empty bus goes by.

Not a cloud in the sky.

A little girl picks dead leaves from the ground and plays with them. She is wearing pink.

A truck that passed by a few minutes ago passes me again in the same direction as before. I get a déjà vu feeling.

Tram 2 goes by.

A green car is parked in front of the pharmacy.

Another tram 2 goes by.

A pink shirt wearing woman goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Dead leaves are moving in the wind.

A car is honking.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Trams are green. It felt so obvious that I didn't make a note of it before.

Two acquaintances pass me by. They don't stop, but laugh at me a little.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

A woman carrying a dry-cleaned dress goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

The sun is hitting a bald man, and I wonder if his head would overexpose if photographed.

A police car with sirens on goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Two women are carrying the same kind of paper bag from a nearby café. They are not together although walking next to each other. Are they conscious of the fact that they have the same bag?

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

An overweight woman comes from the pharmacy and leaves in the green car.

A Japanese woman with a map is looking in all possible directions. I make eye contact with her, hoping she will come to me for directions, but she doesn't.

There is a pause in traffic.

Bus 14 goes by.

A dog like in the movie 101 Dalmatians.

Bus 14 goes by.

I question whether I'm only trying to make notes of peculiar things.

Tram 8 goes by.

Am I not interested in people in plain clothes? I'm ignoring about 95% of the people. Do I pick out people by their appearance only?

A woman with a plastic coffee cup walks past me and goes up the stairs.

Bus 45 goes by.

I think the car in front of me is wrongly parked.

Tram 2 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

I keep concentrating on colors. What would I focus on if the view was black and white?

A Salvation Army van is parked with turn signals on.

A woman with a milk carton in hand approaches the car that is parked wrong.

There is another pause in traffic. Like everything is charging up for a few seconds.

Five dark cars in a row go by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

No more reflections of the sun from windows.

A charter bus goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

The center of the traffic circle is very well maintained. The grass is green and the flowers are growing in the middle of the circle.

The beggar is trying to get people's attention but not succeeding at it.

A car passing by honks.

Another car replaces the wrongly parked car.

There are advertisement posters for a hockey team on stands.

Bus 39 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

The construction site goes silent.

Pink, orange, red, and yellow clothing everywhere.

An apartment with open curtains has three dead plants on the windowsill.

The beggar gets up and puts her jacket underneath her and sits down on her knees. I'm still sitting in the same position.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

The beggar and me are the only ones sitting.

I start to consider her as a rival. I wonder if she feels the same about me.

A man with a cane walks past.

A girl has a balloon attached to her backpack.

An orange tram 8 goes by. I've never seen one before. Apparently it's orange in order to attract as much attention as possible for the product it advertises, a new cellular phone.

I receive a long glance from a woman passing by.

A tram on a test drive goes by with no passengers aboard.

I'm starting to feel hungry, and I wish the beggar would also take a break.

The metal poles of traffic signs seem to be the most visual thing to photograph.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A woman and a man, whom I assume to be drug addicts, pass me by.

Preset traffic lights seem to define the rhythm, or at least bring it to a halt at times.

They are the only things bringing people together.

Four women, clearly co-workers, are talking and laughing while walking to lunch.

I ponder whether my final written work should have something pink in it.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

I light a cigarette.

A man that resembles someone I know walks past me.

A woman sits next to me, about 3 meters away. I feel enthusiastic.

A black taxi driver is standing outside the café across the street. His skin dissolves into his black suit, and only the white shirt stands out.

I feel like taking a break and coming back later with a clear mind. Maybe then I would notice something else completely.

The girl beside me pays no attention to me, so I decide to leave.

The beggar stares at me as I leave. Maybe she feels victorious.

13:01

I wonder if I missed something meaningful while on break.

The beggar is still at the same spot, and I realize now that she is barefoot. No reason to wear shoes if you are not walking.

The traffic is standing still.

A pedestrian pays no attention to the lights changing red. A car honks.

An orange real estate car is parked in front of me.

The sound of a fire truck, and a few seconds later the truck itself appears from behind a corner.

Tram 2 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by, and a man aboard leaning on his hands is seemingly bored.

Construction site noise begins again.

A girl is covering her eyes from the sunlight with her left hand.

The beggar looks bored.

Bus 70T goes by.

A man in wheelchair is looking at the construction site.

The sun has changed its position, leaving me in the shade of the wall while reflecting back at me via a window to the left of me.

Two girls are running to catch a bus that already passed them by.

Two girls meet at the middle of two car lanes, hug each other, and leave in the same direction.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

An empty bus that is not on route goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Another bus that is not on route.

Tram 8 goes by.

A boy asks me for a cigarette. I give him one although he probably is underage.

Two real estate company women walk past me, and I notice that the company car that was in front of me has taken off.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 18 is full of people sitting mute as it passes by.

A police car stops at the lights. I always get concerned when I see the police, as if I had done something wrong.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

The clone of my ex walks past me in the opposite direction than before.

Bus 39 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

A man with a suitcase has a tattoo of a hand on his hand.

An old Kleinbus goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

If I weren't a photographer, I probably wouldn't see anything to photograph here. This is like a sight on the way to a real sight; a sight between sights.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Another police car stops at the lights. I try to make eye contact.

Tram 2 goes by.

I notice another dead plant on the window of the building next to me; a different window this time, but the same apartment. All the plants look alike. Why would anyone get more plants they can't take care of?

A Porche drives by.

Tram 8 goes by.

13:28

A boy with a Mohawk exits the pharmacy and passes a drunken man that approaches the beggar who tries to avoid him, but he starts talking and pointing at something with his hands. He clearly has something to say involving this place. I wish I knew what he felt so strongly about and keeps pointing at. After a while the man decides to leave.

While I was following the drunk man's path, the orange real estate car has pulled back into the same spot as before.

Bus 45 goes by half empty.

Tram 2 goes by.

Most of the people seem to be walking alone.

No pink clothes to be seen.

Bus 42 goes by.

An ambulance with sirens on drives by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Another ambulance goes by. There is a hospital nearby. I cannot see it from here, but I have prior knowledge of this.

I want to find something new to observe.

A small girl carrying a big cello case on her back walks past me. From behind, only her legs are visible.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

I'm trying to recognize people.

The construction site is silent. Don't know for how long now.

It's beginning to be cold in the shade.

Grass is growing from the cracks in the pavement.

An empty plastic bag is swirling in the wind like in the film American Beauty.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Another orange real estate car is parked in front of me; the engine is still running. The motor stops, and two men with identical red pants step out.

Bus 18 goes by.

A passing car is honking.

Tram 2 goes by.

A bus not on route goes by.

Bus 18 to the other direction goes by.

A woman is accompanying a mentally disabled man who has a sincere smile.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

Construction site sounds start over again.

Tram 8. The people inside do not seem much happier than the ones riding the bus.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

I light a cigarette.

A girl in black is wearing pink Converse shoes.

Bus 39B goes by.

I realize I almost never take the bus.

Two no. 14 busses intersect.

A van with "Porvoo" written on it, a city approximately 50 km from here, is standing next to the real estate car that has "Home nearby?" written on it.

The beggar makes a phone call.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

I can see 85 windows on the green building next to me, of which two have dead flowers on the windowsill.

I miss the number of a bus passing by.

A Japanese boy and a girl walk past me. They don't seem lost.

A car with a trailer and boat passes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

A police car goes by.

Two Asian girls walk against a red light.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 39B goes by.

A bus not on route goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Another police car goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

A man with crutches walks past me.

How many cars drive through this place per day? How many people on foot?
How long is the beggar's work shift?

An ambulance with sirens on goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

A blond woman with hair that seems to be electrified walks by.

Bus 39B goes by.

Everyone knows how to function in this place, the directions of movement. No one improvises.

A bald woman crosses the street towards me. The light is different than a few hours ago, but would her head overexpose?

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

The two acquaintances I saw earlier approach me to inquire what I am doing.

Tram 8 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

An ambulance goes by.

The repetition of trams, busses, ambulances, and people walking begin to define the character of this place.

Bus 41 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

A girl with a broken ankle and a woman with her hand in a cast walk by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 39B goes by.

Things to observe seem to be narrowing down. Cars, busses, beggar, cars, busses...

Trees and walls obstruct me from following a single person's path for very long.

There is a pause in traffic.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Taxi drivers are smoking cigarettes. Some inside their cars, others outside. One of them stands with bad posture, almost like a prehistoric man's.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Two young schoolgirls sit on the steps to the left of me. They are whispering to each other and paying no attention to me.

Bus 45 goes by.

It's 14:41 and I'm going to get some coffee.

The beggar has shoes on.

15:21

The beggar is gone. I'm disappointed I missed it.

Tram 8 goes by.

An old woman with a walker goes by.

A girl in an orange shirt pulls her pants up. The pants are black.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Two number 2 trams intersect.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

A janitor is picking up trash and cigarette butts.

Tram 8 goes by.

I'm smoking and throwing cigarette butts.

An old woman reminds me of my other ex-girlfriend's aunt.

People seem to be walking at a slower pace with shorter steps.

A friend of mine once told me that people should vary the length of their steps more. We are used to walking with a certain kind of step, which leads to the body not being used to its full extent, and as you get older, your posture will pay the price. Who thinks of varying his steps on different days?

Bus 41 goes by.

I miss the beggar.

Bus 14 goes by.

A young girl in a short shirt is exposing her belly.

Bus 205 goes by.

The sky is the same shade of blue as before.

Tram 8 is half full as it passes by.

Tram 2 is less full as it passes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Three drug addicts are going through a bag laid out on the concrete in front of the pharmacy.

An old, bearded man crosses the street slowly, leaning on a wooden walking stick.

A girl in a leather shirt runs across the street.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

One of the addicts seems eager to leave although he has trouble standing up.

Bus number 412 appears for the first time and goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

Bus 39B goes by.

An elderly lady walks past me, stops, and points to the opposite direction, which she then takes. Did she point to herself where to go? Imagine if we all pointed directions to ourselves.

A cyclist is riding on the sidewalk.

Bus 39B goes by.

A girl is standing at a red light and crossing her legs in posing manner.

Tram 2 goes by.

The sound of sirens is coming from the left of me. I begin to count the seconds until I can see the approaching vehicle, but suddenly the sound stops. Approximately five seconds into my count.

A girl in a pink sweater is carrying a blue yoga mat.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A group of four Muslim girls stare at me while passing by.

A girl in a black and white dotted dress is carrying a cake.

A girl walking up the stairs beside me glances at me and smiles.

Tram 8 goes by.

A pharmacist is cleaning the glass of a store door.

Leaves on the ground are making a rattling sound.

Bus 45 goes by.

The green building next to me has a muted tone, as if the sun has washed the original paint away.

16:08

Tram 8 goes by.

Two foreign travellers are carrying heavy backpacks.

The orange tram appears again. The direct sunlight gives it a neon look.

Bus 70T goes by.

The real estate company's car is on the move.

A lady is wearing a fez, a Moroccan hat, and holding it with her hand so the wind won't take it.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

A mother and daughter cross the street. The mother looks like a model.

Green light,
Red light,
Red pants,
Green dress.

Bus 42 goes by.

Two trams intersect.

I eat an apple.

The only traffic sign visible to me in its entirety indicates directions to the right with a white arrow.

A girl is wearing green glasses.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

A green light turns to red through orange.

A man sits in front of me, holding a coffee cup. He is wearing an Indian style dress and a scarf. He has an I-pad and a patch on his arm. After a while the man stands up, and I can see he has a bra on and breasts, but also a beard.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

The passing bus 14 is almost empty.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

A pause in traffic.

Seven people are walking on different sides of the square.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 39B goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

An empty charter bus goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Two taxis are parked on the stand.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

The fast food place advertizes traditional mustard since 1952.

A tanned girl has a bronze colored skin tone.

An overweight brunette woman walks by.

A man with a much younger woman walks by. He has his hand on her hip.

17.00

DAY 2.

Date: 6th of September 2014, a Saturday

Time: 09:25 a.m.

Location: Töölö Square, Helsinki

Weather: Partly cloudy, morning mist is fading

It is cold outside.

A few cars go by.

Three people are walking on different sides of the square.

The marketplace is open. The orange tents are more visible than yesterday because there are less cars.

Tram 8 goes by.

A man is walking his dog. He is wearing a long, blue, striped coat.

The sun is starting to break from behind the clouds.

Bus 42 goes by.

A man with a baby strapped to his chest walks by.

Bus 42 is going to the opposite direction than the one before.

Bus 70T goes by.

More cars are going by.

I can see nine people scattered around the square.

A woman from the pharmacy brings a stand outside.

A lady wearing a black hat and a black dress crosses paths with a man wearing a beige hat and a dark suit.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 39, half full, goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

An empty cigarette pack is next to me on the ground.

A tired looking man and a woman cross the street.

I light a cigarette.

A woman is walking a dog and drinking coffee from a white cup.

Tram 8 goes by.

The lady with the black hat is pacing back and forth.

An elderly woman with grocery bags is waiting for the lights to change.

A golden colored car drives by.

The sun is beginning to shine.

A man with a small dog walks by.

Outside the pharmacy a man kneels down to stroke a small dog. He also talks to the dog.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A man with dark sunglasses and a cane crosses the street.

The sound of an approaching tram gets louder, and the tram appears from behind the corner.

A woman opens the kitchen supply store, leaves the door open, and brings out a stand.

Bus 41 goes by.

Cars go by.

A taxi driver is leaning on the open door of his silver colored Mercedes Benz.

Tram 8 goes by.

A police car drives by. Two officers, a man and a woman, are inside.

The sunlight changes rapidly due to the moving clouds.

The construction site is silent.

A woman with wet hair is waving to her running son not to cross the street.

Tram 2 goes by.

A girl I recognize crosses the street holding a coffee cup in her hand.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

A fire truck with the sirens on drives by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Reflections of approaching cars are visible in store windows.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

An old, grey haired man is wearing a coat with camouflage patterns.

Tram 8 goes by.

Two small boys with identical sneakers are kicking a white plastic cork.

The passing bus 14 is full.

A charter bus with a guide talking into a microphone passes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Fallen branches lay on the ground.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

I have lost interest in trams and busses, but they bring a certain kind of structure, a rhythm to this place.

The sun is shining directly at me.

Two girls smoking cigarettes blow the smoke out simultaneously.

A young man standing at the traffic lights does not move even though the light turns green.

Tram 8 goes by.

10:20

Within a distance of five meters, there are asphalt, tiles, rocks, and cement.

The passing bus 70T has an Espana advertisement on the side of it.

Bus 39 goes by.

A passing blond girl has an approving expression on her face while looking at my notebook and me.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

A woman with a short stature walks in tiny steps.

Five people are walking around the square.

The interior of the passing bus 18 is completely shaded except for an elderly, white haired lady whose seat is directly in a light beam.

The view appears calm, excluding occasional cars.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

The cars seem to favor two directions out the five possible.

Bus 41 goes by.

The driver of a red convertible has a brown leather helmet on. The kind pilots wore some 90 years ago.

A bird is singing somewhere near.

Two people are having a discussion, but I can't make out words.

A small, brown dog is sniffing a fallen branch.

A woman talking to a cellular phone says, "But it's good, right?"

Tram 2 goes by.

A police car passes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Two Russian men are talking while crossing the street.

The sound of cars honking can be heard from a distance.

A woman has a basket on her bicycle.

The passing bus 45 is honking.

Three people are pushing strollers in a row.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

A man with a moustache has a striped shirt on.

A black Mercedes Benz drives against a red light.

A girl stops to tie her shoelace.

Bus 70T goes by.

Three drunkards are rummaging through a plastic bag.

A couple holding hands walk by.

Two dogs have a rendezvous. Their owners stand still.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 42 going to the other direction.

Pigeons are lounging near the marketplace.

A man with bad posture enters the pharmacy.

A woman is looking down at her feet while walking.

Tram 8 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

An Indian couple walks by pushing a stroller with two children sitting side-by-side.

A woman with bright yellow trousers walks by.

A man with his hand in a cast holds it up in the air.

Bus 45 goes by.

The man with bad posture exits the pharmacy.

A pigeon flies over the road.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

A half empty charter bus passes by. A guide is talking into the microphone.

Bus 18 goes by.

A child stares at me while his father pushes a stroller with his left hand. With his right hand, he talks into a cellular phone.

Tram 8 goes by.

A woman holding a coffee cup walks past me, making eye contact and saying, "Good morning." I reply, even though I don't know her.

Two girls wearing all black pull up in a black car.

My hand is casting a shadow into the notebook.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

A jogging girl has sweat on her slightly red face.

Tram 2 goes by.

Inside a charter bus, a guide is giving directions to the driver.

Bus 45 goes by.

Tram 8 has a darker green color than the damp grass of the lawn it passes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A girl has pants matching the color of the yellow pharmacy sign.

Bus 39 goes by.

A man is carrying a laundry basket.

Tram 2 goes by.

Twelve cars make it through before the green light turns red.

A girl walking three small dogs on a leash is accompanied by a girl walking a husky.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

A man sitting in a wheelchair uses his legs to move the chair slowly forward.

Bus 42 goes by.

11:02

A woman is carrying a bouquet of flowers wrapped in plastic.

Tram 8 goes by.

The girl I recognized before is walking from the marketplace with a box of blueberries.

Bus 42 goes by.

A woman is walking two dogs of the same breed, one black and one brown. Both dogs have a red collar.

Bus 39 goes by.

A man is carrying his daughter on his shoulders. The girl is laughing.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

I light a cigarette. The sunlight makes the smoke visible.

An older man, maybe in his fifties, has a ponytail.

Two women appear to count paces like in a duel.

Clouds cover the sun.

An overweight woman is wearing an overly tight black dress. Her belly wobbles as she walks.

A woman is wearing ripped jeans.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

The sun emerges from behind the clouds.

Bus 45 goes by.

I feel I'm in plain sight, more so than yesterday.

The two girls dressed in black leave in the black car.

People are swarming the marketplace.

The sun hits a woman in a bright red coat.

A girl smoking a cigarette smiles at me.

A man is walking a dog that resembles Tintin's Milou.

Most of the clouds have evaporated.

Tram 8 goes by.

There is a pause in traffic. No cars.

The nearest pedestrian crossing makes a 45 degree angle half way. Before and after the angle, there are 9 white stripes on the ground, marking the crossing.

A woman is looking inside the clothing store, or she's looking at her own reflection on the window.

Bus 45 goes by.

A woman in all white accompanies a woman in all pink.

A woman stops to take off her coat.

A man is holding onto a balloon shaped as a champagne bottle.

Tram 8 goes by.

A girl is carrying a baguette.

There is a queue of five people in front of the cash machine. A young girl at the back of the line moves restlessly from side to side.

An ad on the side of bus 45 says "Wonderful People."

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

An empty stroller stands in front of the kitchen supply store.

The young man with a moustache returns.

Tram 2 goes by.

From bus 39, a girl with tattoos looks at me.

Tram 8 goes by.

The restaurant window distorts the reflections of the incoming trams.

Bus 41 goes by.

A beggar, an older man wearing a hat, arrives at the pharmacy.

A passing girl seems very conscious about her walking. She keeps glancing at me.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

The beggar sets up his camp by the pharmacy front.
He lays a cup on the ground about 3 feet away and sits down on top of his folded jacket.

Bus 14 goes by.

Three cars are trying to find a vacant parking spot near the marketplace.

Trams 2 and 8 intersect.

A very muscular girl wearing gym clothes walks by. I can see the veins on her biceps.

Three Chinese tourists walk around as if they were lost. One of them has a N.Y. cap on.

Bus 45 goes by.

The Chinese tourists ask for directions, and a woman points a direction for them.

The beggar notices me.

A cyclist rides in the wrong direction on a one-way street.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A motorist has red devil's horns on his helmet.

A man in a pink t-shirt walks by.

Tram 8 goes by.

The beggar keeps staring at me. I feel a little intimidated.

Bus 42 goes by.

13:32

The café on the side of the square is closed.

A man in a white shirt is holding hands with a woman in a black shirt.

A well-known singer with a red cap on passes me with his girlfriend. He is over a foot shorter than her.

Bus 205 goes by.

The beggar has his hands crossed in front of him.

Tram 2 goes by.

An older woman with a walker has a wig on, and a younger man has a receding hairline.

The anorexic woman from yesterday appears.

Tram 8 goes by.

A pregnant woman with dark glasses walks by.

The sky has a light blue color.

A man is running to catch tram 8.

Bus 39 goes by.

A little girl is holding onto a My Little Pony balloon.

An elderly woman does not make it over the crosswalk before the lights turn red.
She smiles at the driver of the waiting bus.

Bus 18 goes by.

The beggar is picking his nose.

Two men in black suits pass by.

A boy almost runs into a railing but dodges it at the last minute.

A white limousine drives by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

A couple is carrying a cardboard box together.

Tram 8 goes by.

A traffic jam builds up and cars are honking.

Bus 45 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

A girl with brown vintage shoes walks by.

A woman is texting and driving.

The beggar takes off his hat and wipes his face, which is either very tanned or very dirty.

Two women are wearing identical red coats.

A pink shirt is visible on the other side of the square.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

A man with an empty Ikea bag is running.

Six people with cello cases stand in front of the school next to me.

Bus 42 goes by.

The beggar leaves.

Bus 70T goes by.

For about a minute, no pedestrians walk by.

Bus 39 goes by.

A pale man in a white t-shirt has a sweater tied around his waist.

The sun shines softly.

Tram 2 goes by.

Through a window in the building next to me, I can see 2 white lamps, different plants, a snowflake ornament, a deer statue, figurines I can't recognize, and a shelf with books.

A girl I know approaches carrying a cello.

A man carrying a cello walks past me.

People with cellos are walking everywhere.

The girl I know informs me they are practicing for an upcoming concert.

Bus 41 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

There are five empty balconies in the building across the street.

A girl with round shaped glasses passes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

People are walking, waiting, talking, driving, smoking, sitting, and shopping.

A woman with a bandaged head sits in a car.

Tram 8 goes by.

A man waiting for his wife is pointing at the dead plants in the window.

A skinny girl with very big breasts walks by.

An Indian man with an empty cart is walking three meters ahead of an Indian woman who is carrying a pile of newspapers in her hands.

Bus 45 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

A girl is laughing by herself.

Tram 8 goes by.

A woman is wearing a black shirt with silver glitter.

A man removes his glasses in order to see his phone better.

Tram 2 goes by.

All the passing cars look as if they just drove from the carwash.

Bus 70T goes by.

A girl has proportionately short legs in relation to her body.

A woman is carrying a lamp wrapped in brown paper.

Bus 42 goes by.

A couple walks by. The woman has a black eye patch. Both of them are eating apples.

Several people are carrying flowers.

A woman straightens her shirt.

Tram 2 goes by.

A dark haired girl has a picture of two women on her t-shirt. She resembles one of the them.

A girl blows up a tire on her bicycle.

Bus 14 goes by.

Reflections of buildings can be seen on parked cars.

Bus 18 goes by.

A small gust of wind blows.

Bus 41 goes by.

A black car with red hubcaps drives by.

Tram 8 goes by.

A one armed man gets into a taxi.

Two people are standing on the bus despite vacant seats.

Bus 18 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

A Russian charter bus goes by.

A man sits beside me to drink a cider.

Bus 14 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

A woman is carrying a dog over the crosswalk. She is not wearing any socks.

In a certain spot, the sun hits passing cars, creating flashes of light.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

A woman is wearing red shoes that resemble slippers. The shoes have a rosette on top of them.

Bus 42 goes by.

An old man with a cane is trying to catch the green light. He is irretrievably late.

A girl I know comes to smoke a cigarette with me. She has blue fingernails and has to leave in hurry.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Another girl I know comes to say hello. She's on her way to see an exhibition.

A taxi takes off.

Bus 41 goes by.

Two painters are having a break near the pharmacy. Their overalls are covered in dark paint.

Bus 14 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

A middle aged woman walks past me and glances over.

Bus 39 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 41 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Bus 14 goes by.

Bus 18 goes by.

Tram 2 goes by.

Tram 8 goes by.

Bus 205 goes by.

Bus 45 goes by.

Bus 70T goes by.

Bus 42 goes by.

Bus 39 goes by.

I leave on the 8.

17:03

CONCLUSIONS

“What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manner, our utensils, the way we spend our time, our rhythms.”¹

Afterwards, I felt that my attempt at an objective description of the place failed. The result was excessively influenced by how I felt while witnessing events around me, how I interpreted, them and what meanings I incorporated in them. I found rules, order and rhythm, but also the absence of things I had expected to notice.

I was aiming at a description of events without interpretation, but that was found to be impossible. I feel my opinions became unavoidably obvious despite trying to avoid that. I made assumptions about people and their actions based merely on their first appearance. Perec urges to us ‘classify people,’ to make note with precision of the distinctions between them, to give random people a social status based on their outer appearance or the pace and posture by which they go about. That is exactly what I did. The method of remote sensing meant there was an absence of communication with the objects. I made plain assumptions. I evaluated people by their first appearance and by my prior encounters with people resembling them. I looked for flaws, peculiarities in people, something that would make them stand out. Things existed only for a short time: “A girl with a backpack is running across the street. I lose sight of her behind parked cars,” , but in my mind I could have followed her even after her disappearance. One’s mind tends to create stories based on fleeting encounters.

On occasion I became somewhat frustrated with constantly noticing similar things such as trams and busses, but now I see how they provided continuity and rhythm, a structure to the place and events. They divided time and therefore enabled me to pay attention to events happening between them. Also by being familiar with the place, it was easier to observe the ‘unusual’ and to break individual actions into smaller parts, to simplify. Small fragments would open the space and define it for the seconds I witnessed and wrote them down.

Time worked to my advantage. The more time spent, the farther I went with my observation. First I took note of the obvious, and only after that I truly concentrated on what was beyond the first glance. But at some point I hoped for something major to intervene and disrupt the constant cycle of this place. To make everything truly come to a halt. But it seems that it always requires a spectacle, something extra-ordinary to draw our attention. Loud noises, burning buildings. A bus crashing into a wall makes the wall visible, but 365 days of mundane events, minor happenings, are dismissed. What is worth discussing about common, obvious, ordinary? More specifically – what is worth questioning? The everyday is the fabric that binds our lives but is regarded as self-evident. Things have lost their origin. But once minor events come under close scrutiny, they become exceptional, unreal.

¹ Perec 2008, 210

In order to be present in a moment, we need to start seeing things “for the first time.” Rediscover them. We need to be surprised, intrigued. We need to question the common, everyday. We need to ‘crash the car.’ There needs to be less looking and more seeing. There is immense volume in mundane places. There is a spot in the view that has never been seen. We need to look the other way from the vista point. Stop what you are doing, look at the details and make an inventory of things around you. Things are happening right now.

“carry on....until you can no longer understand what is happening or is not happening, until the whole place becomes strange, and you no longer even know that this is what is called a town, a street.....”²

How many of us can describe our home street meticulously, the one place we walk many times a day? Do we remember decayed walls, cracks in the pavement, the colour of the car parked in front of our house, the people who walk the same street? Are there stores on the street? What kind of windows do they have? Do the stores keep their front doors open or closed?

“Our field of vision reveals a limited space, something vaguely circular, which ends very quickly to left and right, and doesn’t extend very far up and down. That is how we construct space, with an up and down, a left and right, an in front and a behind, a near and a far.” perec, species 81

Blindspots are not only outside our vision but directly in front of us. Our multitude of senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch seem to be unused in the city. I do not suggest that people should go licking buildings and rails, but concentrate what it really is that you think you are perceiving. To really break it down, cut it to pieces. After the field-test, the place turned into an attraction for me, a place to take pictures and to send postcards from. It made an impact on me.

Is there a point when observations turn from the view to the observer himself? The investigation is not only about the happenings around me but also about me. Is there a need to always attach oneself to the scene and to understand one’s own place in relation to others? We need other people to be able to stand out as individuals. In a sense, I was isolated from the scene, the view, but also an equal part of it. The guest appearance of a friend also changed the scene entirely for the duration of her presence. I had to explain myself, and somehow I felt embarrassed, as if I was doing something strange or wrong. A person knowing you incorporates your individuality in the place. You are no longer nameless, but defined. You become a part of something, you are recognised and revealed; I was staring at people, evaluating them. Was I allowed to look at someone as long as I did?

In the end, when I leave on tram 8, I become a part of the mundane. I am a part of the scene I previously observed.

THE IMAGES, A BOOK AND AN EXHIBITION

In the beginning of *Notions of the City; Notes on a Place*, I had no images and no ideas for one. The premise for the work was observation in a general sense, and I was certain that the images would come at some point. This was a new approach for me as in the past, the images came first.

During the process of making and writing notes, I had difficulty visualizing my notions. The questions were as follows: Is it possible to transform an experience into a visual form, to capture the essence of it in a photograph? How does the way I perceive my surroundings relate to my artistic endeavour?

After the field-test, it became apparent that I was fascinated with the buildings as they, for me, represented something larger than themselves; they were the city as a whole. But I wanted to reduce and distance the objects from the landscape, the city-view. Narrowing down information about the whereabouts of the buildings, and also the exclusion of people, was a choice by which I tried to avoid giving unintended meaning to the images and the concept of the work.

The images could be and are from anywhere in the city. They do not portray scenes from the field-test. I felt that would strip the experience and interpretation of the viewer. As the field-test spot is somewhat random so are the locations of the photographed buildings.

The images are isolated abstractions, modified interpretations, bare structures with only the essentials left. I wanted the images to suggest endless possibilities, to distance themselves from the physical location, to become a monument to something that is not really there. But at the same time, I wanted the objects, the buildings to portray a larger view. I gave myself the exemption of altering and modifying the images any way I pleased. In some instances I removed windows, doors, power lines, trees, whatever to make the buildings more vague, unrecognizable.

One way to present the city could have been by means of long-exposure photographs to emphasise the permanent structures and turn living, moving objects into a mist, to make them disappear completely, but I felt that would have taken the visualization too far into traditional architecture photography.

I wanted to make a physical object, a book, of the field-test with the images. Something that one could take with them and read on the way to somewhere. I hoped that the reader would start to look around in a different manner, that the book would work as a catalyst, and the reader would nod his head in approval and act. There is no afterword in the book, no conclusion, because there are no answers to give. The book describes an act. By writing an end, I would have closed the matter when I really wanted to start something. In a sense, the book ends midway. I wanted the size of the book to be fairly small and the layout simple. My main requirement was that the book is easy to read.

The images will be exhibited in the autumn of 2015 in a new gallery by Heli Mäenpää called Bang Band gallery. Based in Helsinki, the gallery is part of the Aalto EE program and exclusive. The exhibition is custom made for the space and consists of nine framed pieces of work. The sizes of the work vary from 40x50cm to 80x110cm.

The naming of the images was and is the most difficult part of the process. I didn't want to identify specific places or buildings by revealing their addresses, but at the same time I was intrigued by the idea of letting the viewer/reader have a chance to visit the original places. The problem with naming is that it gives a definition, which in this case I wish to avoid. At this time, 6 weeks before the opening of the exhibition, the photographs are untitled.



EPILOGUE.

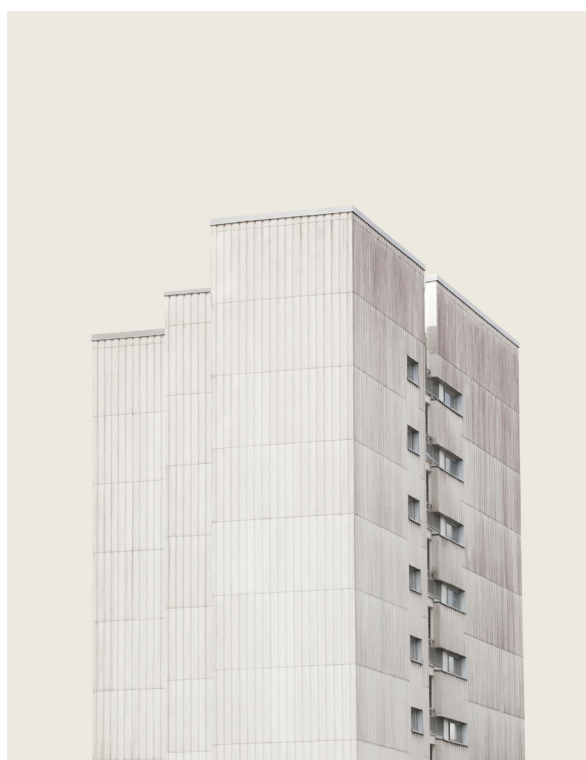
At the end of this work the original questions remain. I am, in a manner of speaking, still sitting on the steps and observing, but with higher regard for the city and the people in it. The city might consist of too much information to absorb, and observations are always made from the outside, from a distance, so they can never reveal the true nature of things. The city is a library of missed moments. Things disappear and reappear, perish and pass away to be born again. Events happen simultaneously. Like two timelines next to each other, they must at some point cross and change places. What I know is we need to be reintroduced to the city; reinvent it, retrace our steps, to make every place an attraction as if we were tourists, passengers. There is no disappointing view.

In the end, everything will not be explained but at some point you know where you are and will be able to say: A place has existed.

“In the end you have to come to terms with the space that separates the interior world from what you see around you” ¹

1 Dean & Cook 2005, 21

LIST OF WORKS.



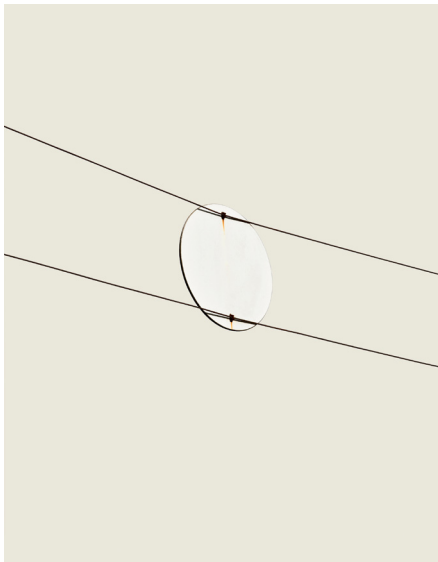
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Notion of the City #1, 2015



Notion of the City #2, 2015



Notion of the City #3, 2015



Notion of the City #4, 2015



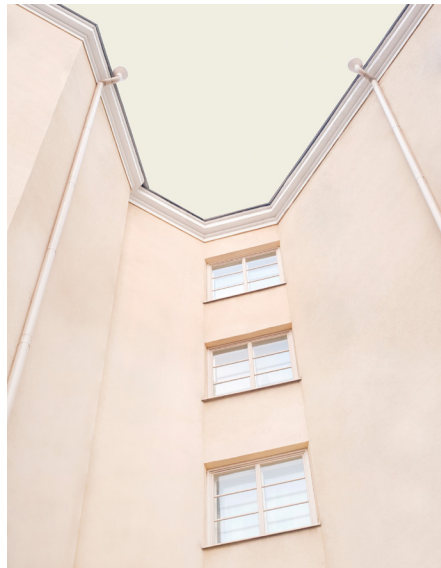
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Notion of the City #6, 2015



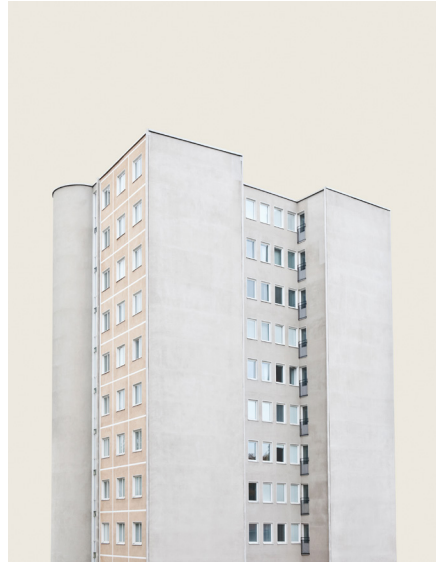
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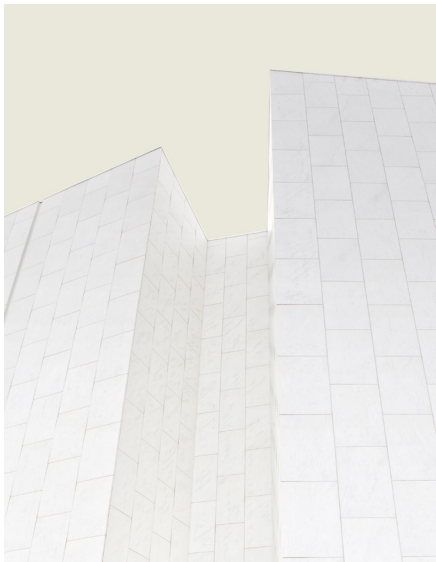
Notion of the City #8, 2015



Notion of the City #9, 2015



Notion of the City #10, 2015



Notion of the City #11, 2015



Notion of the City #12, 2015

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