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*Fausto Curti*

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*Alessandro Balducci*

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## Arriving in Trieste

Pier Aldo Rovatti

If there is an idea which corresponds to Trieste, within this idea the sea and the city correspond to the same experience and to one way of life. If you live in Trieste, you do not go to the sea, *you are there already*, and this fact belongs to the city itself. Actually Trieste is not a *typical town* on the sea at all. Its *atypicalness* coincides with an experience of the sea which is, so to say, preliminary to the fact that the city looks onto the sea, and independent from where you are in the city, even far away from the sea. This marine urbanity or urbanised sea, characterising Trieste, makes people feel as if they are both living on the continent and on an island. You are at the same time attached and detached from the mainland. You are not really isolated, you are not living on an island but you are experiencing insularity. Do cities have a character? I think so. Trieste's character, its buildings, streets and inhabitants, arise from a constant and general sense of disorientation which has something to do with insularity. It is this slight but constant feeling of unbalance or oscillation that attracts, I think, people coming from abroad, as it happened to me. Are you standing on land or on water or on both at the same time? Trieste is the city of wind, even before the gusts of *bora* come. You lose your balance even before the windblast actually does it. You immediately feel you are on an island; you are on an isolated corner, as you were told and as the map confirms, but you are living an exciting experience, a slight inebriation embroidered with sadness,

but you were not told about this. Insularity is ambivalent and if the sea opens up in front of you, behind you are surrounded by borders which almost encapsulate the city. Trieste is also the city of borders. It has a twofold nature of enclave, where opening and closure are not always in contrast, and rather most of the times these two aspects get stronger and produce something else which is neither only opening nor only closure, but it is something more than an opening and less than a closure, and paradoxically it is an opening thanks to the very closure.

You always arrive in Trieste (or go back to) and every time you have a feeling of extraneousness as if one had to cross a border to reach the city beyond. The sea seems to lead people arriving to a so called *cul de sac*. Whoever comes to this strange island has the impression of being always in transit, although he/she stops. This impression comes back every day, and it does not matter whether you have lived in Trieste for a few years because this feeling is also shared by the people who have always lived in this city. The enclave experience is the experience of this passage, a sort of transit without moving from the spot. It is as if in Trieste nobody really is Triestine but everyone becomes such. There is a deep-felt Triestine character different from any sort of provincialism which strikes you immediately. There is a pace, a gait, a speed, a sort of impatience and rush of living the city. Coming from Milan, I thought I was fast, but instead I realised I'm rather slow compared to the deep rhythm of Trieste. The supposed speed of Milan is actually a way of standing still on the spot. The apparent somnolence of Trieste is actually the insomnia of an

uninterrupted passing, the restlessness of being on the border which calls for a constant adjustment of balance.

The borders are inside, not outside, or they have been interiorised and this is the very secret of the *enclave-city*. The island is inside rather than outside, as it is clear in every respect, and this island which belongs to every background of Trieste, does not bound or close the city but it allows the city to open up, despite the apparent stillness of time. It is a condition of the mind which stimulates bodies and even things. It does not surprise that this city, which seems lost in its memories and even nostalgic feelings, reveals a great care for one's self and body. People from Trieste *would show off* rather than *hide*. In the *enclave* everybody comes into sight.

All arrive and thus everybody sees one another. Trieste is the city of glance. In Milan, on an underground train the eyes of people are almost always looking downwards; on a bus in Trieste everybody, both the elderly and the young, *scans each other*. These are insular looks in which the transience of the moment flies through and in turn these looks pass by in a border game.

Whoever arrives in Trieste, the city where even the most meaningless details of past times are remembered, learns the art of forgetfulness and can practice oblivion almost at once and build some distance from himself/herself. Soon one finds the energy to imagine another life and is actually able to produce some sort of deviation in his/her life. It is sad to hear, staying in Trieste, about great projects which would cut this city out and damage it. It is a huge mistake because this enclave contains a virtuality of the so-called Europe

which anticipates ways of life and dwelling. Europe will soon need this if it wants to start living. However this confirms, with a bitter taste, that the nature of a *city of deviation* is where who arrives must cut his pace down and get himself/herself ready to continuous dislocations. The external awareness of this unstable balance, which for me is the hidden rhythm of this city, which seems abandoned and almost withdrawn into itself, can arise some fears and not everyone is used to such an uneasy pace. But if you can get into it, and get on the same wavelength of this constant swing between caducity and desire for a new life, you can discover the pleasure of living on an island which is not an island.