

## Opinions

*Dans cette rubrique, nous accueillons des textes qui expriment un point de vue personnel sur l'homme et l'architecture.*

*In this column, we present texts that express a personal point of view on man and architecture.*

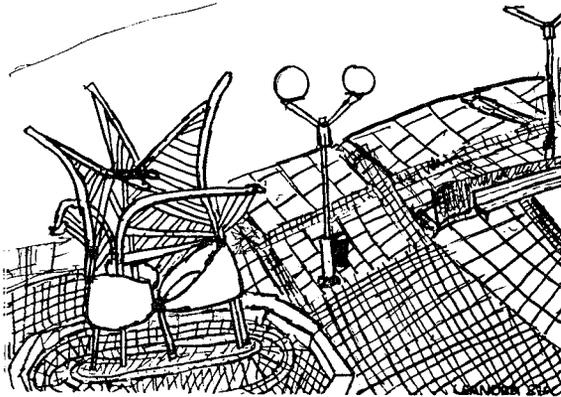
### **About Children's Adjustment to their Environment**

*During the past few years, a few Swedish schools have conducted a programme of so-called city studies<sup>1</sup>. Together with their teacher or other adults they walk around in their community and learn to orient themselves in their environment. This involves, for example, learning what the buildings are called and what their function is, as well as documenting their studies in some way - by means of drawings, poems, stories, photographs - all according to the children's capability and the resources available. A considerable amount of literature is beginning to be available about the process of gathering the material and the information that has been obtained by means of this programme. I shall not report on this material here, but instead, describe the results achieved by two groups that have worked with such a programme.*

*The work by the Rinkeby group in Stockholm was aimed at awakening the children's interest in and commitment to their environment, by representing it in drawings and writings. The success of the project is evidenced by the very personal and perceptive verses the children have written, some of which have been included here. With Rinkeby Square as their point of departure, the children thought about their lives, which for many were lives of immigrants in a foreign culture. The neighbourhood square with its fountain represents a link to their native land, to events and experiences in circumstances that are different from their lives at present. However, the square also evokes dreams and desires of a more general character, such as being free and well-off. Because of these dreams, the children feel loyalty and affection for this square with its fountain, to the extent, almost of "a dog who never leaves the grave of his master" as one boy wrote.*

*At the Kryddgård School in Rosengård, Malmö, Gypsy children worked in a more practical way. They documented their environment while at the same time learning to express themselves about it in Swedish. The children in this school drew and photographed their houses and they constructed models of them describing different elements*

<sup>1</sup> This text is part of a larger research report by the author, "On the Psychology of Place" (The National Swedish Institute for Building Research, Gävle, Sweden 1987) (translated by Eva Claesson). The drawing is by Leandro Gomez, the picture by Elly Berg.



### The wish

One day as I walk across Rinkeby Square  
 The Dull fountain glimmers like gold.  
 All the people are happy and pleased  
 Just as I wish them to be.  
 Suddenly I hear a voice that says:  
 Wake up now Gönül!

*Gönül Öskanat*

### The Fountain

The fountain stands there cold and stiff  
 In the middle of Rinkeby Center.  
 It is covered with snow,  
 And there's snow all around.  
 The whole fountain is made of only steel pipes.  
 I wonder what the sculptor thought as he was making it.  
 Perhaps he thought of freedom.  
 That perhaps he wanted to be a bird  
 that can fly up to the sky  
 where there is neither war nor trouble.  
 That is, perhaps, what I think of as well,  
 when I see it standing there, elegant and proud.

*Agati Noutsou*

### The Fountain

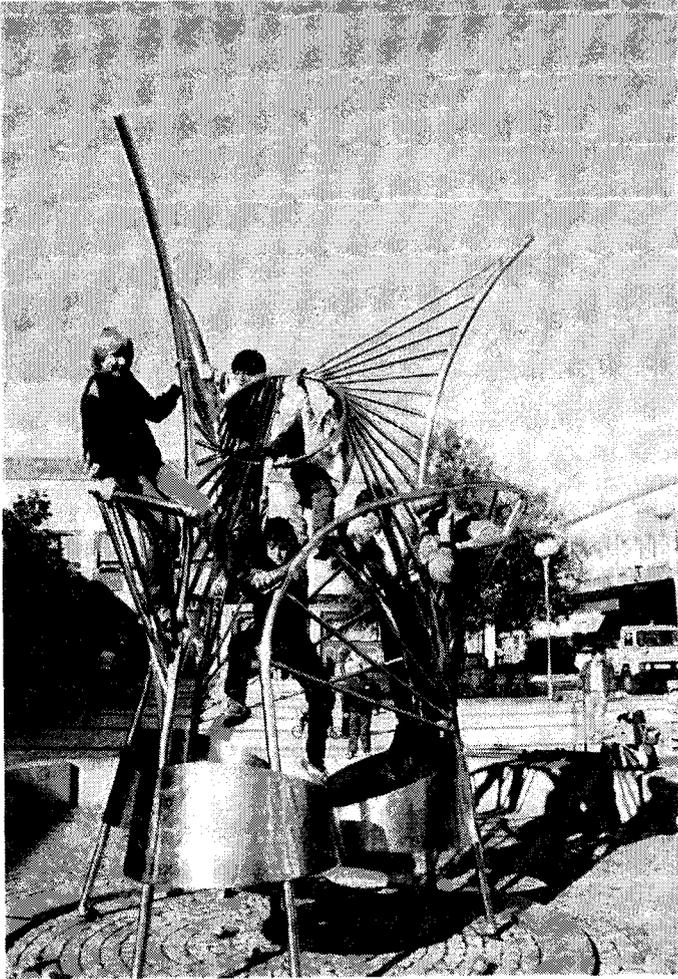
Flowers bloom  
 birds sing  
 it is spring!  
 The fountain glimmers in the spring sunshine  
 still, it is cold nevertheless,  
 but I stay with the fountain  
 just like a dog  
 who doesn't leave his master's grave.  
 Then dusk comes.  
 I go home and leave the fountain tree.

*Leandro Gomez*

of building technique. This practical activity was, apparently, very helpful in teaching the children linguistic concepts that have to do with their physical environment. They described this environment very concretely: The stones, the house, the courtyard, the bushes and the flowers. Reality became tangible, it consisted of what they observed and what they fashioned with their hands. A Gypsy girl wrote: "I am sitting here drawing a house". By means of this activity, this girl established a relationship to her environment, formed an attachment to the place.

The psychological significance of maintaining an active relationship to one's environment has been discussed by the British child therapist D.W. Winnicott (1971). He states that human beings are, from the time of their birth, concerned with the problem about the relationship between that which they perceive objectively and that which they imagine, that is, perceive subjectively. And, he adds, that it is a constant task for the human being to keep separate these inner and outer realities, while at the same time seeing their connection. Winnicott traces the foundation for this psychologically meaningful exchange with one's environment to the relationship between the very young child and his mother. The consequence of a good relationship between mother and child is that the creative capacity of the child is awakened and as a result he is usually able to develop a meaningful relationship to his surroundings. To be able to do this is the same as having a creative attitude to life, Winnicott states. To paraphrase him: It is this creative way of looking at life that, more than anything else, makes the individual feel that life is worth living. The opposite is a relationship to outer reality that is marked by submissiveness, where the world and its components are regarded as something one has to conform to, something requiring adjustment. Submissiveness and compliance engender feelings of hopelessness, that nothing at all makes any difference, that life is not worth living.

As a first expression of the child's creative capacity, Winnicott sees the child's creation of what he calls transitional objects. By this he means objects which constitute emotional links between the child and the mother. The significance of such objects lies in that they help the child to prepare for the separation from the mother before having reached the maturity to take this definitive step. According to Winnicott, the transitional object gradually becomes more important than the mother, and this is a sign that the separation has taken place. Examples of what can constitute a transitional object are: a piece of cloth, a teddybear, a cushion. It can be anything the child chooses and that the mother allows him to have as a possession, to do with what he wants. Its importance lies in that the child uses it as a replacement for the mother when she is temporarily absent or when she cannot fill the child's wishes. The transitional object continues to be important as long as the child needs it. Its fate is to be relieved of its duties little by little - its importance diminishes, it becomes one object among others. By choosing the term transitional object, Winnicott wants to point to the potential that objects



### The Fountain

Rinkeby fountain is nice.  
 When the sun shines on the fountain's shiny pipes  
 I remember other fountains  
 in my life.

The first market square I ever saw  
 was in my homeland Uruguay.  
 There was a rather high fountain there  
 with much water in it.  
 When you look at Rinkeby's fountain  
 it looks empty  
 without water.

Then I remember market squares  
 without fountains.  
 The most beautiful was in Argentina.  
 An obelisc stood in its center.

*Tabare Aiello*

### The wish

I look at the square  
 The sun is shining.  
 When it goes down here  
 it shines on other squares.  
 I think of a square  
 that was so beautiful.  
 It was in Karachi.  
 I bought some juice  
 but couldn't drink it all.  
 There were many people in the streets.  
 In the square a lot of fruit.  
 The fruit I liked best  
 does not exist in Sweden  
 and I don't remember  
 its name.  
 It tasted very good.  
*Shagufta Naz*

*have to help the individual in connecting different events and experiences. The transitional object provides a continuity in experiencing, a connection. The experiencing of deeply felt connections such as the experience of the first transitional object, does not cease at the time of separation from the mother, but continues throughout life.*

*From his practice as a child therapist, Winnicott described the difference between children who succeeded in creating a transitional object and those who failed to do so. He traced the failures to disturbances in the relationship between mother and child. In the beginning, in order to achieve a meaningful relationship, the mother must adapt to the needs of the child almost completely. When this relationship is established, her task is to gradually free the child from the illusion that she is a part of him. However, the mother cannot hope to succeed in this endeavour, if she is not first able to give the child enough of an opportunity to experience the illusion, Winnicott points out. The little child has a justifiable right to experience omnipotence. An expression for this experience or its lack is, according to Winnicott, what the young child sees when he looks at his mother. A child who has a good relationship with his mother sees himself when he looks at her. Her facial expression mirrors what she sees in the child. Other children, who have a long-standing experience of not getting back what they give, do not see themselves when they look at their mother. They see the mother instead. The mother's face is not a mirror, or, as expressed in another way by Winnicott, it is a mirror that children can look at but not into.*

*The little child must experience a trustful relationship with the mother for a long enough period of time during the critical period, when the establishment of an independent self is in its first phase. The creation of a transitional object helps to spare the child the impression of emptiness and divorce between himself and the mother. This impression is avoided first, by means of the transitional object, and then by means*

*of creative playing, using symbols, and by means of all that which gradually develops to become a cultural life, Winnicott states.*

*The anthropologist Helen B. Schwartzman (1978) has written about the propensity of games to further develop a creative attitude to one's environment. She writes that "Children at play learn to be sensitive to the effects of context and the importance of relationships; they develop the capacity to adopt an 'as if' set towards objects, actions, persons, and situations; and they continually explore the possibilities of interpretation and re-interpretation and with this the creation of new possibilities". Play is always characterized by change, transformation, Schwartzman points out, and not by conservation of objects, roles or actions. The character of play is dynamic, not conservative. By means of play the child learns to practice his capacity to see and to create alternatives to his given and immediate physical and social environment. The very activity, that is play, is as important as its aim and purpose, which is to reach a certain result. Because of this, transformation is easy, and the pleasure-giving activity leads on, as though by itself, to new games with new aims and new meanings. In this way, by means of play, the child gets practice in re-creating that which he misses and in inventing that which he lacks.*

*"Playing implies trust", Winnicott stresses, and he explains that "the thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is found to be reliable". This pleasurable attitude towards reality, which playing gives rise to, provides the child with the feeling that he has an influence upon it, that he has the power to affect and transform it to suit his needs and wishes.*

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#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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