

Fragmentation and Juncture

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When I came across terms like fragmentation and juncture in my research on the "City as Living Space. Stockholmers on the City" (Bygghälsöförskningsrådet, 1991) it was mainly in the sense of psychological terms. Almost from the beginning of my research it was obvious that the interviewees did not make any distinction between themselves and the city when they made their statements about the city. Personal life and the city were interwoven in a way that brought to the open what the city meant to the interviewees.

And it was this dimension of meaning I wanted to unravel. As an ethnologist I am interested in the individual as both carrier and creator of culture in its broad sense. This time my interest was focused on how nordic citizens, in this case Stockholmers, related to the city and urban life, and how they went about giving urban culture a shape to suit their taste.

My conclusion is that the attitude of the interviewed Stockholmers, as well as their way of making use of the city, carries the stamp of contemporary modernity. By this I mean that the citizens move between the poles of contemporary modernity, which are in fact fragmentation and juncture.

Let me show you how I arrived at this conclusion, and let me begin with a quotation taken from an interview with a man in his early forties.

"The city heals. It helps me to bridge the gap I feel between different sides of my personality. I don't consider myself to be a clear-cut person, but one who is full of contradictions, who tries to establish some sort of context in my life in order to keep my mental health. My maturing as a human being has to do with bringing together these different sides, the lightminded part of me and the more responsible one. I do not believe that anyone is clear-cut, and I decided to accept that I am partly Dionysos and partly Apollo. They are part of every human being, so it's best to make friends with both of them."

It is the self-reflecting attitude, mirrored above, based on self-consciousness, which is one of the characteristics of contemporary modernity. Especially during the 80s it has even become legitimate to be self-reflective, and as we know, almost immediately there was a market to exploit this interest for the self. The concept of the self and of self-development is interpreted differently though, which also is shown by the quotations I give in this paper. To some it means a revolutionizing process, to others it means being involved in a life-career. What I would like to point out however, from the very beginning, is the fact that all of them, independently of how they interpreted personal development, try to relate to something whole, a symbol of totality, of which the city is one. I will comment on this traditional function of the city to centralize and to structure, and even to express a superimposed order in its form, later on. I find it important though to keep in mind right from the beginning that the city had a

symbolic power of this kind - and obviously it is still vital - in order to understand the individuals quoted here, namely to understand their attempt to reestablish order in a fragmented reality.

Let us now turn back to the interviewees, and let us see how they experience fragmentation. A 62 year old woman thought her surroundings and her fellow men to be increasingly strange:

"I don't understand what is wrong with the people who make decisions in this city. They don't seem to be interested in fundamental values. All they are interested in is tearing down and making things worse. There is so much shortsightedness and lack of culture; it makes you sick."

To be able to understand why the woman spoke with so much bitterness it is necessary to mention something about her background. She grew up in the countryside in northern Sweden during a period of economical hardship. Since that time the woman always felt that she was underprivileged despite her efforts to improve her life-situation and to work hard to achieve the goal. The woman took the ideals of the working class movement to her own, ideals like improving the quality of life by education. She also embraced other social democratic ideals of that time such as the special Swedish concept of the "*folkhem*", which means a society as a home for everyone. A place in this ideal society was guaranteed for every honest and diligent person.

"But the fact is that I feel homeless now, and I feel estranged in this society as it looks now",

explained the woman and wanted to give an example by referring to the city.

"Look at Stockholm, at the very heart of the city, where everything is torn down that was a link to our history. Instead there is a traffic roundabout on street level and a plaza below that looks like a pot to me where everything unpleasant is lumped together: dirt and people who scream and fight, a frightful sight indeed. Here, if any place, it shows that the idea of the *folkhem* has fallen apart and turned into a society with disillusioned, aggressive and drugged people. That is no *folkhem* to me, it is like any other society."

Here we have a strong statement indeed, filled with disappointment and bitterness over a life dream that was not fulfilled. The same type of reflection that is based on disillusion was shown by a third interviewee, a young woman, who immigrated from Poland ten years ago. She had left Poland for the sake of freedom, as she framed it. Her plans were to fulfil her academic studies in Sweden and later on to embark on a career in one of the professions. But it never turned out that way. Very soon the woman realized that she was unable to study and support herself with a low status job at the same time. She also felt almost paralysed by the thought that she was in no position to make any choices concerning her social placement in the new country. She had to accept what was offered to her. One of those offers was an apartment in one of the suburbs built during the 60s as part of the "million dwellings" programme in order to improve the housing conditions in Sweden. These suburbs have nowadays a high percentage of immigrants. The interviewee said:

"There is too much social realism about those places and it reminds me just too much of what I wanted to leave behind me in Poland. Besides, I am no proletarian, I am bourgeois. How could I bear to be banished to such a place? It would be like going to hell."

Because the woman detested so much the very thought of living in such a suburb, she put a lot of effort into finding an alternative. Her solution was to live together with a man whom she could not accept as a partner because of his proletarian background. However the man was in a position to offer her an apartment in a more fashionable part of town. It was once a low class area, but now fashionable among artists and intellectuals. The part the woman liked best was a square in her immediate neighbourhood, partly because it reminded her of the middle class district in Poland from which she had come.

"Here, in this square, the pieces come together for me. This square gives me a feeling of authenticity at the present time of my life. This place reflects the person I have been and feel I still am - a Central European bourgeois in exile. The history of this place, namely a working class area, is also a reminder of my present mesalliance with the man I live with and with the country I chose for my exile. Yes, this is how I feel about Sweden, because I cannot find the cultural refinement here I know from my home country, at least I cannot find it among the people I work with and the people I am forced to socialize with, not to mention the people who live here close by, drinkers a lot of them. But there are others as well in my immediate neighbourhood: artists and people who belong to the intelligentsia. They are my kind of people."

This very personal way of interpreting an environment illustrates quite clearly how an exchange between individual and place manifests itself, and it throws a light upon the phenomena of why certain places are ascribed a healing effect, so expressively framed by the woman above: "Here, the pieces come together for me, here, I feel authentic, and this is a feeling I strive after."

As we recall the interviewee in my first example, a man, also desired authenticity. He spoke of wholeness:

"An authentic person is whole, and I want to be whole. That means I want to affirm the different sides of my personality, like the male and the female side of myself. This also means that I need to have access to different worlds, the male and the female world. The male world signifies survival to me, the female world stands for life. I actually find those poles in the city: the male world whenever I come across visible structure and order, the female world when there is boundlessness, which I associate with sensual, mystical and animated places. A sensual place to me is for example a harbour. The sea gives me this experience of boundlessness, like the sensation you can have in love. It makes you feel boundless like when sailing. It is of utmost importance to me to be in contact with an environment that gives me access to the inspiring depth of our existence, an environment that gives a foundation and where just being there is something in itself."

Here we have an example of how places of juncture are described. As the quotation makes clear, places of juncture are experienced as places that have a potential to heal, to bring together fragmentation to a whole. The experience of inner fragmentation again is the result of repressive circumstances, which is the case when the individual feels hindered in developing his personal potential. Frequently the interviewees wanted to blame their experience of fragmentation on the weakened position of humanism in contemporary society.

"I believe it is the conception of the human being, that is wrong. There has been a reduction of the human being to something like a production unit.

The human being has turned into an object for the development of society, but I believe it should be the other way around",

said one of the interviewees, who felt very strongly about the direction that the changes had taken in the city.

"And this misconception of what we are and what we need is visible everywhere. It is even visible in urban planning. This city is one example. Stockholm has been exploited in accordance with those functionalistic ideals. I agree, it is certainly soothing to reduce oneself and others to functionalistic objects who are predictable in their acts and their orientations, instead of looking at oneself as a free spirit with responsibility for oneself, which includes to find out for oneself where you have come from and where you are going."

In my material the term *förstening* which means turning to stone comes up several times. It was used by the interviewees when they wanted to explain what happens when the connection was cut to what was called "the inspiring depth in our life", or "a bearing foundation", or "an inner centre" etc. There is thus a circling round a concept of centrality in the interviews that made me think of a traditional idea of the city, namely as an existential centre. The concept of centrality in connection with the city is clearly shown in a fairy tale that has the medieval city in focus. I think it is necessary to get acquainted with this symbolic and at the same time popular image of the city. Let me therefore briefly refer to a fairy tale where the concept of centrality, as a place of power, plays the main part.

There is first and foremost the ruler of the empire as a symbol of centrality. Then there are central places in each city of the empire. In one city it is marked by a tree which gives apples of pure gold, in another by a fountain full of delicious wine. There is no doubt about it that the citizens in those cities had a high quality of life, as we would say today. But the good life came to an end, which was a gradual process and took its course parallel with the ruler growing ever more greedy and hostile to life. At this point the fairy tale presents the young hero, whose personal qualities are described as being accepting of life and full of youthful courage. With these qualities he also qualifies as a bearer of life. This is also the very reason why the ruler feels threatened and why he decides to get rid of his rival. Since the young hero has won the love of the ruler's daughter, the king is in the position to make demands, seemingly impossible ones, like going to hell to fetch three golden hairs from the devil's head. But, as we know, the young hero is confident, and so he sets off on his journey to hell. His decision to accept and the journey itself turns out to be of utmost importance not only for him, but for the whole empire. The visit to the underground demands courage, but it also turns the young hero into a man. Down there in the underground secrets are revealed to him, secrets of such value that they can liberate the flow of life. Thus is the knowledge the young man carries when he comes back from his journey and on which he also acts. He brings back the life to the cities, and he replaces the king. Now the right man is in the right position.

What I find especially noteworthy in this fairy tale is the type of dynamic it focuses upon. What actually happens is nothing other than a liberation of the blocked flow and power of life. The image of blocked life power turns up several times. I already mentioned the ruler's mental state of mind, and there are the cities with their barren centres, symbolized by the the fountain and the tree. Both are symbols: the tree with golden apples is a symbol for fruitfulness and eternal life, the fountain with its

wine is a symbol for transition from the earthly to the spiritual spheres. When eating and drinking this special food the earthbound soul can gain access to a higher sphere. Thus the "good life" is generated by the constant moving back and forth between two poles: the earthly and the heavenly.

The figure of the ruler in this fairy tale gives us the image of a blocked dynamic flow, the figure of the young hero is an image of life in flow; his attitude and his actions tell us what is needed in order to release the power of life. The journey to the underground can also be understood as a journey to the unconscious, which very well can have the character of hell. One needs courage and confidence to enter upon this journey in order to confront and to deal with the forces ruling there. But this is the necessary step for bringing life. Only then is the strength released to be constructive in a humanistic sense.

The dynamic this fairy tale focuses on undoubtedly furthers personal growth. It does so because it goes deep; it reaches into the very centre of the personality. In other words this is a development from inside. The contact with the inner centre releases the personal potential. Here we have the central message in the fairy tale; thus it turns up again and again in different images. The tree and the fountain as well need a contact with the blocked depth to be able to produce golden fruit and wine. Their renewed contact with the profound turns them again into magic places and therefore gives the citizens, when coming there, a sensation of touching "the inspiring depth of our life", as one of the above mentioned interviewees framed it. The tree and the fountain could once again become magic and central places in the city, because they had regained their power to bring together two essential opposites. The healing power however, derived from the possibility of integrating these spheres.

I mentioned in the beginning that I wanted to know how the Stockholmer relates to his/her city, and I wanted to find how contemporary modernity / urbanity can be pictured in accordance with what is told by the interviewees. Let me return to this question now, and let me do this with reference to what has been said so far about the character of so called magic places.

The interviewees named many places as attractive, or even magic; places which could be characterized as typically urban. But there were also others mentioned, which do not really correspond to the idea of an urban place. Those places were pure nature, like the water, which is part of Stockholm and unkept, natural-looking pockets of woodland.

"I just love to take a walk there, because it reminds me of the forest back home."

How should one interpret this statement? Is it an expression of simple nostalgia, and at the same time a sign of feeling alienated towards the city? In this particular case I know it is not. The just quoted interviewee is a 71 year old woman. She turned out to be a real city-fan, and she had actually left everything behind her, just to be able to become a Stockholmer. That was ten years ago. She was living then in the middle of Sweden in a little community. She had an occupation as a teacher, she was married, she had three grown children, and she had a house. She said:

"I just was finished with everything, and I felt the need to set out on a new life before it was too late. I wanted to be free, and I wanted to be adventurous for once in my life, so I decided to quit my job, divorce my husband and sell the

house. And I haven't had any regrets, not for one second, because now I feel this divine freedom I was longing for, when I walked in the woods back home. I always felt free when I took my walks, free and comforted and at the same time a little adventurous and myself. I would like to compare this sensation with what I feel towards the city. I feel free here, since I can be as I am. I can cultivate my interests, and I can socialize with people I have chosen myself, people who even might be somewhat odd. On top of all this I also have real nature, like this beautiful park in my neighbourhood, so now I have everything I need."

I find this statement very interesting, because it draws parallels between city and nature in such a distinct way. Of course the woman is not the only one who felt this way. It seemed almost as if the experience of liberation and freedom, which was ascribed to the city, needed to be tied to those parts of the city where nature had survived. I would like to give another example right away. Let me just conclude that the feeling of liberation and freedom went hand in hand with the experience of generosity. City as well as nature were described as generous, because they had tolerance, namely a tolerance for a wide variety of species in the city just as in nature. "Here I can be as I am", said the woman above, referring to her previous life in a small community where her need to expand personally was not satisfied. She felt free from restraint only when she hiked in the woods. At that times she felt more herself again, but her release was finally made possible by the city.

Another Stockholmer, a woman of 38, expressed a similar wish to release her personality. Like the preceding example she came to Stockholm ten years ago. In her relation to Stockholm it was the water that played an important role:

"The water is the soul of Stockholm, and when I want to come really close to the city, I do so through the water. I have an experience I would like to share with a newcomer to Stockholm, and that is to bathe naked during a nice summer night right in the heart of Stockholm after a night of salsa dancing in a jazz club nearby. To get dry afterwards one just jumps around on the quay, and then it's time to walk over to *Mosebacke* (a restaurant with a view over the city). They serve breakfast at 5 o'clock in the morning. There one sits and watches the sun rise over *Östermalm* (a part of central Stockholm). To experience Stockholm this way beats it all!"

Once again, this statement gains in analytical value when it is related to information the woman gave on her background and previous life. She said:

"I was raised in a little community by puritanical parents, and I was close to being crushed by their hostility towards life, but since I moved to Stockholm I can distance myself from them, and I dare to live. Stockholm helps me to become more myself. Here I don't have to hold back any more. Here I can do whatever I want to do."

Information of this kind certainly sheds more light on the woman's delight in naked bathing on a summer night in central Stockholm. To me her bathing or immersion in the waters of Stockholm seems like a symbolic act. It can be looked upon as a baptizing act in the sense that the woman baptizes herself to her new identity, her urban identity. She explains that:

"I feel at home in big cities; they have so much to offer. I feel attracted by their generosity, because that is a trait I like to develop myself."

The two last examples I have given reveal a close relationship with nature. I found this mainly with Swedish interviewees. Individuals with a foreign background (mostly from Central Europe) were also taken with the natural beauty of Stockholm, but the natural expressions of the city did not fulfill the same magic function for them as for the Swedes, i. e. there was no identification with nature. Instead very urban places were mentioned, rich in architectural expression, but of an integrated kind. Those places had the same abundance of expressions as in nature, but the abundance was of a cultivated kind. Urban places of this type were described as "exploding with life in every square meter", and it was a life of great variety in rhythm and expression. Places with this magic also revealed cultural history; they had cultural density, and they had it in an integrated form.

It is important though to point out that such a place does not necessarily have beauty of a kind appealing to all tastes. Some of the places mentioned in my study even had a somewhat rough character, that was appealing to some and not to others. It also happened that certain places not only were differently judged by the interviewees, but some places came only to the attention of a few. I would like to explain this phenomena as follows: if the individual uses the environment, or certain places in the environment, for the purpose of personal development, then the individual "reads" the environment according to his or her personal disposition. The ability to read, and the consciousness of the environment attached to it, however is of a dynamic character. This is why certain places can appear with a magic gleam during only one period in life, while others remain unseen despite their symbolic potential. Let me illustrate this point with a last example from my material.

The place in question is situated in the very heart of Stockholm and has the function of binding together at least three parts of central Stockholm, Söder (the southern part), Gamla Stan (the old town) and Östermalm (the eastern part), all of them with a distinct character. Söder still bears the mark of poor working class, Gamla Stan is dense with historical atmosphere and Östermalm, homestead of the bourgeoisie, exposes its splendid facade along the waterfront. In other words, three different worlds unfold when standing on that navel, called Slussen, which means the lock, where the salt and fresh water meet. Exactly in this manner were the three parts read by a Stockholmer, a man, 40 years of age. He was raised in the poor part of those three, in Söder, and his childhood was not very happy. He had ambitions though to have a better life. He told me:

"Slussen is part of this dream of mine, it meant possibilities to me. When I stood there, I already had contact with those other worlds, at least they were within reach: the old town with its narrow streets, its many restaurants and strolling people was a friendly and warm world to me. Opposite there was impressive Östermalm, the world of the bourgeoisie, who also attracted my curiosity and kindled my dreams."

The man tried to realize his ambitions of having access to a better world, first by improving his education and later by moving into a higher status area. When I met him, he was still involved in the process of conquering the city and conquering himself. None of the interviewees put the process of double conquest so clearly into words as this man:

"How do I know that the city has become mine? I have asked myself this question many times. I really would like to say Stockholm has become mine."

But I think I am on my way. Stockholm has by now become part of my life, and I also have approached Söder again, the world of my childhood, in order to deal with my past, not only to run away from it."

I think I have given enough examples to illustrate how the individual integrates the environment into his or her personal development. Each person I have quoted felt a special attraction to an environment with an integrated character. They also made it clear that they were sensitive towards expressions of integration in the outer world, because they valued it as an inner quality in their personal development. Further they claimed space for their development, and there was no doubt that this space in the outer world had existential qualities. The places to which the individuals were variously attracted were thus able to offer a range of existential categories.

Of course there were also individuals amongst the interviewees with a less dynamic approach towards themselves and the environment. They seemed satisfied with confirming an already fixed self-image. Others again tended to transfer the dynamic of personal development to the world outside themselves and seemed to be fascinated by places where they were on-lookers of a staged dynamic. Those places did not necessarily have a dynamic of their own, but became lively by arranged events.

There is thus a difference concerning the way an individual looks at him- or herself and evaluates the environment. It is a difference that seems to correspond with the image of contemporary modernity, presented by current sociological research. According to that research one can identify different lifestyles and life orientations in contemporary modernity. They can be as opposite as the terms pre-modern and post-modern indicate. With regard to my own research the pre-modern cultural orientation could be said to correspond to the previously mentioned search for authenticity. The post-modern cultural orientation on the other hand, also noted in my material, seems to be equivalent with a fascination in the staging of performances, be it environmental or personal.

Clear-cut distinctions of this type, however, hardly fit the complexity of human nature. My own research indicates that both self-image and the relationship between individual and environment is a matter of consciousness. It is also worth noting that a close relationship, which also is a caring one, between individual and environment only was developed by certain individuals. These individuals had all experienced and lived through a serious life crisis. In their statements about the city they left room for reflection, and they revealed an almost partnerlike relationship to certain environments and places within the city. And similar to a partnership, there was an exchange, namely the individual was actively searching out such an exchange. It is this active approach, this instrumental attitude towards the city, which to me signifies contemporary modernity. It contains however a traditional element with regard to the city. What I am referring to is the symbolic power of the city as an existential space, even an existential centre. As such the city has played a role during history, which was also expressed in the form of the city. Of this there remains only fragments. The search for and even demand for existential dimensions in the city, that is expressed by the people today, I would therefore like to interpret as a unifying work. I think this way of reconstructing through giving existential meaning deserves appreciation, even respect.