

A model for a qualitative society

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We often find ourselves standing and watching children play. And we have a strong interest in their play. At the same time, we have a feeling that they are also watching us – watching *our* play. We notice that they try to play at things they have learned from us. When we see them playing it is as though we recognise something of ourselves. It is as though we see how they use their play to try to comprehend the world around them. They imitate our actions in play, because we have given them a picture of the world around them. And that frightens us, because we would prefer it if they could comprehend the world around them by themselves. But that would require that we ourselves understand them.

We are frightened because we ourselves perceive society as something above ourselves, outside ourselves.

So we go up to our apartment, up to our world. We know that it is too cramped. Sometimes, at certain moments, we don't feel content with it, with our world. But this discontent is so difficult, so incomprehensible. So we console ourselves with the thought of how hard it was to get the apartment, and that we ought to be grateful that we got it.

But then, sometimes, when we get home from work, we feel deep down inside that we can't understand what we are doing there. It's so small, the children are screaming and running around between our legs. And at work we were discussing politics and got into a bloody row. We couldn't understand why we had to work at such a fast pace. We get paid more – but when we get home, what happens? Well, she's in a bad mood: it's the kids, there's nowhere for them to play outside.

It's no fun any more, they say. And then it's evening. We have the TV, but it was actually nicer when friends used to come by. But they stopped doing that when we had the kids. There's simply no room now; it would wake them up. And anyway the friends live further away now. And we haven't made any new friends here in the neighbourhood.

Sometimes we feel restless, annoyed, about having become isolated. And sometimes we dream of how it could have been, if only we hadn't got in a rut. But there are always too many 'if onlys'. We can't even remember when we gave up trying, wanting to realise our long-cherished dreams. It was all so hard. When we applied for a job we had to bow and scrape, when we had to make ends meet we had to say thank you. Always having to stand in line, bow and scrape and be thankful – perhaps that's why we gave up. It was hard to keep fighting, because we were always too insignificant. But we can dream about all the things that might have been. If only we had been more together. Maybe we would not have felt as lonely, if our friends had come over more often. When we see the kids playing down in the yard, we dream. We know they are playing at being us. That they play at what we do every day. Their contact with reality is the account we give them of it. They play at being cars, at being mummy and daddy and children. They play at cops and robbers. They talk to each other the way we talk to each other. And they play at what they see on TV. They try to make contact with each other – to communicate.

But we no longer talk to one another. There's nothing happening any more that we can give one another. And we notice one day that the children have also stopped talking to other people. Because they do what we do. But what if they were allowed to do all the things that we didn't have the opportunity to do? Because that's what we've been working for. Then they could play and express themselves as human beings together with other kids. What if they were allowed to play with all kinds of things, to build, to play with water and fire, to paint? Then they could become themselves. And do what we never managed to do.

Yes, but their words are our words. They try to comprehend the new world they see, and their information comes from us. After all, the only people they know are us. How could they comprehend their reality if we don't comprehend ours? Perhaps we did everything wrong. We worked to give them a better life. But they express themselves in our images. Now, if we had given ourselves the opportunities we want to give the children, then they would also have expressed our reality. In other words, we have not given our children better opportunities than those we had ourselves. That means that we have given them the same conditions in which to understand other people and society that we have, and are incapable of using. And if they feel isolated now, it is because we are.

But how can we change ourselves now? We lack the necessary means to prevent what we don't want from happening.

Meanwhile, we hide inside our own little world, and feel that there is nothing we can do. And that's the picture we convey to our children. But the dreams we once had about how things would be for us - we hope our young people will have those dreams as well. And not only dream them but actually make them come true. We could make those dreams come true now, to show the kids that we are not afraid of society. After all, those dreams were about creating something, experiencing what we did as something meaningful. Being able to change things that we knew were wrong. Having the right to decide. And we talked about this with all our friends. About what we would be able to do. When we were together, we could do something. Because we felt solidarity for one another. We wanted the right to make decisions about our own work, about the production of which we ourselves were a crucial part. In those days, we didn't want anyone to have a worse life than we had. Because that was the logic of society. And we agreed that we would live close to one another - and that we ourselves would always decide where and how we would live. So we could learn from one another. And play with our children - tell them about

everything we had been through together. Tell them about other countries and other children, so that they would understand that other people have the same right to play as they did. And if anyone tried to stop us, we would change our conditions. In those days, we wanted ourselves.

And now, when we see children playing, we want to offer them the chance to play like children, and we experience that same feeling we had then. In those days, we wanted to experience this, having a life, one day; a qualitative life. But now we know that we need to change ourselves, our own approach to society and to the people we encounter and know, while giving children the opportunities they need as human beings.

Then they will also play at what we do.

And that is a model for a qualitative society.