

forget how unpleasant such a place might be for the student who is there for many hours, day after day. Similarly, we make hospitals convenient for the doctors and sterile in order to avoid transmission of disease, but end up with places that isolate patients from their normal world, depress the spirit and sap the will to recover!

Learning from children

Children's play has already been mentioned several times in this book, and I make no apology for turning to it again, since the failure to appreciate its true nature seems endemic amongst architects, planners and landscape designers. Such designers must, during their careers, design for all sorts of highly specialized situations of which they may have no direct experience of their own, and yet I find somewhat ironically that architects and planners can be at their most naive when designing for children. It almost seems that many of them somehow totally avoided childhood and were born as adults, such is their lack of understanding of the child's mind and behaviour!

In Chapter 7 we saw how putting up a sign in a housing estate actually encouraged the football games it sought to ban. In fact the mistake had begun much earlier in the very basis of the whole layout of the estate. The Radburn principle of segregating vehicles from pedestrians in housing areas is intended to increase comfort and safety, and is predicated on the assumption that all will comply. Those most likely to benefit, children, are in fact least likely to do so in my experience. Children are essentially trying to learn about the world through their play. Often they are trying to find the limits of acceptable behaviour, so in this sense they are intended to be naughty! Without naughtiness there can be no discovery of the limits. Children are therefore not naturally compliant and disciplined, but rather they are creative and potentially disruptive. I am sorry to say that the failure to understand this is fostered in schools of design everywhere I have been. The Radburn layout creates 'safe' areas of grassy spaces overlooked by the living room windows of all the surrounding houses, and it creates hidden garage courts of concrete where there will be parked cars, garages left open, cans of oil, tools and many more exciting objects. To me it is obvious where the children will want to play! The writing on a plan of the words 'children's play area' seems to be enough to seduce both the student and tutors alike into believing that this will in fact happen. The intentions behind Radburn were laudable, but the assumptions embedded in it were that people, and particularly children, would behave logically. Well actually of course they do, but it is the logic of the child not the logic of the designer that prevails here!

In fact, even as parents we seem to have put our own memories of childhood behind us. How often does one hear a parent say to the