

Sindre Andersen

**FREE PLAY —  
ABOUT THE WORK  
A ROUND AROUND  
A ROUND AROUND  
A ROUND AROUND  
A ROUND AROUND  
A ROUND AROUND  
BY MARCELO CIDADE**

Sindre Andersen is a Norwegian translator, critic and lyricist. In this essay he writes about Marcelo Cidade's interest in the indefinable urban space, which he views in terms of Dutch architect Aldo van Eick's "poetic structuralism."

I'm standing in a revolving door and thinking, "Actually, I'm not." Because in a revolving door you have to keep moving. You don't stand there dreaming and reflecting. A revolving door is a zone of transit, a white, transparent no-man's land in which you are sluiced through a merry-go-round, over the threshold from one public area to another; to something enclosed – a lobby, a shopping mall. The spinning of the door is, if not industrially, then at least practically determined. You don't come here to play. Revolving doors were invented and introduced in the USA right at the end of the nineteenth century, apparently to avoid draughts and to keep horses out of hotels and restaurants.

Brazilian Marcelo Cidade has created a large revolving door for the Oslo Biennale, or more precisely a revolving gate – rather primitive it must be said – and placed it in the notorious, hidden-away underpass beneath the Nylandsbrua bridge in the Oslo neighbourhood of Grønland. Unlike other revolving doors, which often put you in one of three or four compartments, Cidade's white-painted gate consists of just one surface, with a bar as a pivot in the middle. The diameter extends between two concrete posts. It is made of steel and you can climb up it – although presumably only children are able to get their feet between the bars or into the characteristic diamond-shaped footholds. He has taken the pattern from a type of lattice security grille that is common in small shops in Latin America and Portugal.

The revolving gate stands close to the banks of Akerselva, a river bed running from Nydalen and the College of Art down to the Opera at its mouth, which in the time since the turn of the millennium has been given a better-groomed and delicately creative look. Nevertheless, just here, where the Vaterland bridge crosses the river and marks the boundary between Grønland and Vaterland, you still find among other things the city's main area for hash dealing.

"People in Oslo are afraid of this place, but I'm not," Marcelo Cidade tells me on Skype from the other side of the planet, although the time difference is only five hours. He is sitting somewhere in the big bulge on the map of South America, in São Paulo, the city where he has always lived and worked, and where the privatization of public spaces has gone further than in most other capital cities. The city's well known prohibition of outdoor advertising from ten years ago was meant to function as a counterweight to this, but it has also affected the non-commercial culture of posters and promotions, Cidade tells me. He himself is no fan of the prohibition, which he thinks in the final analysis obstructs democratic expression.

We also find this interest in the indefinable urban space in the work of the architect Aldo van Eyck, well known and influential for his 'poetic structuralism' and his powerful challenge to the Functionalism of the inter-war years. One of the most important things that van Eyck built was playgrounds; several hundred different ones around Amsterdam in the decades just after World War II; with climbing frames shaped like igloos, small sand boxes, and minimalist asymmetrical hoops for swinging on, if you wish. Open forms typified by a suggestive user-friendliness which at the time was quite revolutionary in its field. The Dutchman's utility sculptures appealed greatly to the creativity of children, and were based on a radical view of human social relations, with artistic links to the Situationists and the avant-garde CoBrA group.

Few of van Eyck's play apparatus still stand today, and although there was never room for merry-go-rounds in the architect's vision, Cidade's old-fashioned latticework comes closer to van Eyck's Situationist understanding of play and urban space than it does to the plastic spinning-tops that stand and rock in the playgrounds of our own time.



31

A gate in rusty-grey surroundings, a simple mechanical sculpture, without the direct absurdity of some of Cidade's earlier work. It is both hard and cheerful, fresh and old-fashioned; it fools around with us; it isn't black, as one might perhaps expect (and as it was conceived at the time when I talked to Cidade) – it is shiny-white, a white-painted fence that lights up the grey surroundings. In one sense, it's a do-it-yourself revolving door without any function, situated in a kind of no-man's land. In another sense, it's a fence, normally used to enclose, but here 'loosened up' to make a playground.

Play as an activity can function as a territory marked-off from the established, and may even be consciously law-breaking. But just as often it remains blissfully unaware of both laws and the world order, as children (and seriously playing grown-ups) often are. Rather than the forbidden and subversive, what is revealed at this obscure spot in the city is play as possibility and entertainment, as lawless, pointless activity.

And the circle drawn by the revolving gate radiates new circles beyond it, around it, from it. It reminds us of the city's various functions and phenomena: rotation, dis-location, role-playing, semi-democratization. If we elevate our gaze a little, the urban economy itself as an activity is also a form of controlled play where the masses are drawn into a game that pretends to be freedom. Viewed this way, the roundabout becomes a grindstone, another mill in a succession of many, where inside is slavery and *outside* is freedom.

Fortunately Cidade has made the gate wide and spacious, so it does not easily get crowded. You can vary and improvise. How big could he have made it? Could a roundabout have swept the whole city along with it?

In our society, all public areas are in fact zones of transit. And a revolving door is a roundabout, an involuntary perpetual motion machine in urban space, a place to hide. It forces you to slow down. If you hesitate on the periphery, you are in danger. You might be knocked out. Border zones are dangerous: if you stand on the border of the border, you are in a new state of exposure. Why not stay put and keep on turning round and round in the revolving door? Again, you will embrace public space as a playground, and be given free play to think. Thoughts need (indeed are) motion, but not necessarily from one place to another.

What if the *world* itself could move to a rhythm that followed the whims of the player, the child? A little forward, a little backward, always around and around, rolling and alternating at the same time, almost as a consolation for standing still.

It already does. But that is why we should enter Cidade's roundabout again, to renew ourselves and create our own freedom, our own tempo, by both denying and parodying the world. *This is not going to the mall – or home.*

