**Authenticity and commoditization at home - Interest and affect in the built environment**

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**Short Abstract**

This paper investigates how interest and affect are entangled in the built environment of new Danish homes. The paper unfolds tensions and conflicts in the process from design through branding to occupancy of the house, and the relationship between authenticity and commoditization is explored.

**Long Abstract**

In Denmark, the concept of authenticity is often associated with old houses. By way of design and branding, though, new neighbourhoods are made authentic, referring to their historical past, architectural uniqueness or sense of community. Based on a fieldwork in three new residential buildings in Copenhagen, the paper explores the inherent paradox of the staging of authenticity.

Rather than viewing the house solely from the perspective of the resident, the study ethnographically traces the entire process from design to occupancy in order to investigate how notions of value and authenticity are negotiated. The aim is to unfold how forces of commoditization and singularization intertwine as the house is transformed from an architectural expression into real estate for sale and eventually into somebody's home. What tensions are revealed in this process and how are interest and affect entangled?

Authenticity seems to be a key concept in contemporary branding of products, places, and more recently also private homes. On the one hand authenticity thus seems to be closely related to the commercial value of things, on the other hand the authentic is held to be an expression of an inner nature or feeling; that which is not staged and commoditized. The paper questions this apparent paradox and discusses how interest and affect are entangled in the built environment, as new homes are made authentic

**Paper**

INTRODUCTION

“Queen Margrethe buried”. The headline is remarkable not only because it insinuates the death of the regent of Denmark, but also because this information is found on a website about architecture and urban development in Copenhagen. The article however turns out to refer to a much less dramatic story about the residential building “Brohuset” in the new urban district of Ørestad. At the foundation stone for the new building, a document was walled up containing the information that this house was built in the 34th year of Queen Margrethe II’s reign.

By walling up a reference to the monarch of Denmark and issuing a press release about it, the building owner is probably trying to add to the building site a little of that history, soul and authenticity, that the area is commonly held to be lacking. Ørestad is created in a part of the former preserved green area Amager Fælled on the outskirts of Copenhagen. The lots were sold by the Danish State in order to finance the construction of the Copenhagen Metro, and Ørestad today is a long strip of relatively open urban landscape with high-rise buildings, containing apartments, businesses, a shopping centre and hotel- and conference facilities. In the public and professional critique, it is often claimed that this district is not ”real city”, as it is too sterile, too homogenous, too new, too dead. The architecture in the area is mainly by prestigious Danish and International architects, and the streets are named after famous Danish architects like Arne Jacobsen and Kay Fisker. The public wit has however nicknamed the district “Plørestad” (muddy city) and “Ødestad” (deserted city). Much effort has in recent years been put into creating vibrant urban spaces and a sense of history in new urban areas in Denmark, and among architects and planners it is held to be a considerable challenge to build on greenfield land. But why is it of such importance that new urban areas appear to be vibrant from the very first day, that they are taken into use? To what extend is it possible to design, stage and create such things as city life, history and community, that would probably otherwise evolve over time and with use? What notions of authenticity are at stake, and does it make a difference to the residents, once they move in?

These questions are not only relevant within the field of architecture and urban planning, they also touch upon core anthropological concerns on how we relate to the things and places around us, what is being socially negotiated by means of the built environment, and how processes of commoditization and singularization intertwine as houses and urban areas are transformed from architectural expressions into real estate for sale and eventually into people's homes and everyday spaces. In this paper I explore theses questions based on a fieldwork conducted in the spring 2012 in three new residential buildings in the Copenhagen Region. Inspired by American anthropologist Igor Kopytoff’s classical notion of “The cultural biographies of things” (Kopytoff 1986), I track the three building complexes from drawing table to occupancy, interviewing architects, building owners, real estate dealers, residents and other users. Furthermore, I take residence in each of the buildings for 1 month, conducting participant observation in the daily life of the building post occupancy. In the time of writing, I am about halfway through the fieldwork, this paper being a preliminary exploration of some of the emerging analytical themes. Below I shall briefly outline a cultural biography of each of the three cases, illustrating how not only houses but also stories of the place’s authenticity and singularity are built:

BUILDING STORIES – 3 CASES

**The A-house** Situated in Copenhagen’s harbour area, the house with the shape of an A was originally built in 1963 for industrial use. Later on it was used as an archive for The Danish Broadcasting Company and the Danish Postal Service, but was also left empty for several years. When the developer purchased the building with the goal of turning it into exclusive loft apartments, they had to wait with the refurbishment process for a couple of years while the City of Copenhagen completed the district plan. In the meantime the new building owner decided to sublet the worn-out building to ateliers for artists and creatives. In an interview the architect in charge of the refurbishment, Carsten Holgaard, explains that this was partly to act as a patron for the cultural life of the city, but also to provide the building with a history and creative aura, to hype the place and change most Copenhagener’s view of this area as being on the outskirts of the city. For a couple of years, the A-house thus served as a hub for underground artists. Parties were held here, music videos recorded and several artists that have later on become well established had their studios here. In 2006-10 the house was refurbished and converted into 180 New York-style loft-apartments, tearing down and replacing everything but the concrete skeleton. The artists had here and there painted on concrete pillars and walls, and their traces and marks were preserved and integrated in some of the apartments. Furthermore, the building owner funded the print of a coffee table-book documenting the creative life of the house in aesthetic photographs and texts on the magic of temporary creative spaces. Before the refurbishment was completed, the financial crisis had however hit the Danish building industry, and it became difficult to sell private apartments. The building owner therefore decided to change the house into service apartments and opened an apartment hotel with the name STAY. In December 2009 all apartments were sublet for the COP15 summit held in Copenhagen, and this financed the furnishing of the whole house. Now the house has the status of something in between a hotel and a more permanent home for its residents: 5 apartments have been sold, a few are occupied by families who need a temporary home for half a year while building their own house outside of the city. The majority of the apartments are however occupied by international people who are temporarily in Copenhagen on business purposes. Some stay for 2 weeks – others come Monday-Thursday every week, year after year. They stay in furnished apartments, eat breakfast in the café, leave for work most of the day, work out in the gym at night and cook in their own apartments or go for takeaway in the ground floor shops. All of the apartments are however still for sale, and every Sunday the real estate dealer presents the house to potential buyers. He stresses the history of the place, the unique architecture of the loft apartments, and the convenience of STAY’s common facilities of reception, café, gym and rooftop terrace.

**The 8-house** was finished in2010 andconsists of 476 townhouses, apartments and penthouses integrated in one giant building with the shape of the figure eight. 391 of them have been sold, the remaining are still for sale. A 1 km long pathway winds up along the facades making it possible to walk – or even bicycle – to the top of the building and enjoy the view of the surrounding vast green area. The 8-house is located on the outskirts of the new urban district of Ørestad, bordering the 2000 ha preserved flat green area of Amager Fælled.

The branding highlights that the building was designed by the internationally acclaimed Danish architecture firm BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group), and that the apartments besides all the amenities of a modern home, includes charming details such as crooked angles and varying floor-to-ceiling-heights. The architect has on various occasions described the project as “a modern mountain village”, and the metaphor is also used on the website: “*The pathway is planned as a natural meeting place for the residents of the house and as a safe thoroughfare for children visiting one another. As an extra bonus it creates a very charming way to move about within the building complex. Like living in a mountain village, where one moves in a rolling landscape and every now and then just has to stop to enjoy the tremendous views of all four corners of the world!*” ([www.8-tallet.dk](http://www.8-tallet.dk)).

In order to ensure a vibrant atmosphere from the beginning, the building owner financed the running of a café that opened long before there were enough customers in the area, and a temporary gallery exhibiting 8 young artists from 8 European art academies. The real estate agent explains in an interview: “*We had to do something to get people out there, and to show them that there can actually be city life in Ørestad*”. On Sundays when potential buyers visit the building, the estate agent turns on the light in the empty apartments in order to make the house appear more alive. In the centre of the 8-house there is a common room, and the developer even launched a special intranet-system called 8-book in order to facilitate the residents’ communication. In retrospect he however says that this was actually to shoot himself in the foot, as the intranet is now used not only to organize social gatherings but also to mobilize residents against shoddy construction work and to discuss how to deal with the massive groups of architectural tourists and other visitors, climbing the pathway, in order to explore the spectacular building. The public interest has increased after the building was rewarded with numerous Danish and international architecture prices, and according to some of the residents, the architect has several times been photographed by the press bicycling on the pathway of the house. The apartments represent a broad range of sizes and prize-levels, and the resident-group is consequently quite diverse both in terms of age and social and cultural backgrounds. As there is no residency requirement, a number of the apartments are owned by expatriates and international residents, who only live there part time.

**The Long Meadow** Is aco-housing scheme, where the residents’ dreams of community and togetherness are sought integrated into the architectural design, as they are themselves developer and owner. The complex is located in Albertslund 15 km West of Copenhagen, and is constituted of 54 townhouses forming an oval around a common courtyard. They are privately owned and have separate kitchens but also common rooms and communal eating six days a week. The building complex was initiated by a small group of friends who dreamt of living together but with each family in their own house. They bought the building lot in Albertslund and recruited more residents by way of their personal networks as well as advertisements in newspapers, on lampposts and in day care centres. After gathering a group of a sufficient size they took up loans in the bank and engaged the architect Dorte Mandrup to come up with sketches that matched their visions. They gathered for workshop sessions developing their ideas on what the place should be like, and the architect responded with an oval building complex, dark painted and with narrow window panes on the outside, and with a light façade with big windows on the inside facing the courtyard. They were allowed dispensation from the area’s district plan, as it was originally not permitted to build to the border of the building lot. The Municipality had previously set the names of the area with each lot being named after a tree sort (oak, ash etc.), but also here the group worked hard to get a dispensation: “*We did not want a name that sounded like some ordinary council housing project or an old people’s home. Finding the right name meant something to us, like when you name your child*”, one of the residents told me. Instead they went through the local history archive and chose the name The Long Meadow that had previously been designating a part of the area.

In 2007 the construction work started, but in 2008, shortly after most of the residents moved in, the bank and developer went bankrupt before finishing the construction. Consequently, the residents had to establish their own building agency in order to complete the plan, and they organised work gangs taking care of painting, filling and finishing the building and surrounding areas. Several of them stress how these experiences – though tough when they went on – have resulted in a strong sense of community. At a common workday in the courtyard during my fieldwork I observed the residents’ endeavours to transform the gravel plot into a lush meadow, nursing the numerous tiny trees. A resident told me how she really looked forward to the time, when the trees grew bigger: “*Places with old houses and big trees are so charming. We don’t have that here – but then again: We have our own history, about the bankruptcy and how we had to finish the building ourselves. That is what makes the place special and what you tell people*”. The vast majority of the residents have been involved in the building process, as only a few of the houses have changed owner. Though diversity was a core principle in their original vision, the group of residents are relatively homogenous consisting primarily of families with small children, most of them academics.

BIOGRAPHIES OF BABIES

As two of these cases are very newly built and one was recently heavily refurbished, it might seem premature to talk about these houses’ careers or biographies, as suggested by Kopytoff. He illustrates how the life expectancy of a hut among the Suku of Zaire is about ten years: As the hut ages, it successively changes from housing a couple into being a guest house, a teenagers’ hang-out, a kitchen, and finally, a goat or chicken house – until at last the termites win and the structure collapses (Kopytoff 1986: 67). In a society like Denmark, the life expectancy of a house is rather a hundred – or even several hundred – years, and in this respect the buildings in question can still be regarded as babies. By using the concept of biographies, I do however intend to focus on the process in which these buildings are created and taken into use.

The interesting thing about them is how not only their physical design, but also their story, life and use to a large extend is sought designed from the beginning. What intrigued me in the first place and made me choose these cases was the paradoxical circumstance that what seemed to be regarded as the value of these new buildings was everything but their newness. Whereas new among the Suku seems to imply social status, as the value of the hut decreases with wear and tear, the opposite almost seems to be the case in the built environment of modern-day Denmark. A worn-out shack is of cause not necessarily regarded as more valuable than a new building, but as demonstrated by the biographies above, a lot of effort is invested in creating a sense of life, history and identity in the new residential buildings – even before they are taken into use. In doing the cultural biography of a thing, Kopytoff suggests that we ask, what people consider to be an ideal career for such a thing (ibid: 66). Judging from the three cases above, the ideal career of a residential building is apparently not to start out as an empty framework that will afterwards take shape and meaning of the life and use that happens to inhabit it. At least not among the people involved in creating the place. My argument is that their interest is to give the place value by giving it an aura of authenticity that takes place through what in Kopytoff’s terms could be called singularization.

SINGULARIZING COMMODITIES

Kopytoff introduces the concept of singularization as opposed to commoditization. He states that in the West, we tend to see saleability as an indicator of commodity-status, whereas non-saleability imparts to a thing a special aura of apartness from the mundane and the common (ibid. 69). If we thus take commoditization to be the process in which things become exchangeable and values homogenized, then singularization, Kopytoff argues, drawing on Durkheim, is the cultural discrimination projected unto objects that renders some things “sacred” (ibid. 73). Collective singularization takes place when societies preclude things from being commoditized: public lands, monuments, state art collections, royal residences and so on (ibid.). Complex societies are characterized by a yearning for singularization, writes Kopytoff, some of which is satisfied individually by the kind of private singularization, that “governs the fate of heirlooms and old slippers alike – the longevity of the relation assimilates them in some sense to the person and makes parting from them unthinkable” (ibid. 80). Besides this kind of affect and sentimental values that ties people to things over time, one might add to the notion of private singularization, the process that goes on, when people appropriate things by leaving their personal marks on them, such as reorganising and decorating their homes. I shall return to that perspective later. According to Kopytoff, processes of singularization and commoditization intertwine as things move between spheres. Cars, for instance lose value as commodities as they age, but as they reach the age of thirty, they move into the category of antiques and rise in value with every receding year (ibid.).

In all of my three cases above, processes of singularization are endeavoured by those involved in shaping and building the places. In the A-house by reusing an old industrial building, though it would have been a lot cheaper to tear down and build a new, and refurbishing with unique architecture, where several building components had to be specially constructed or moulded in situ. In the 8-house and the Long Meadow that are both cheaper housing, standard building components were used, but in the 8-house they were put together in a complex manner resulting in a vast variation in apartment-types, as well as the crooked angles and fluctuating floor-levels. In the Long Meadow the building complex was tailored to this specific group of people, its design reflecting their dreams of communal living, giving them a strong feeling of a special place. In the A-house and the 8-house artists were strategically involved in shaping the public opinion of the place, and in both places characteristics of a building post-occupancy were staged and integrated from the beginning by turning on the lights, preserving the marks left by the artists and ensuring cafés and shops in the ground floor from the very start. Initiatives that can be said to mime the type of singularization going on when things are taken into use and people leave their marks on them.

STAGING AUTHENTICITY

By relating these processes of design, building and branding to Kopytoff’s concept of singularization, I do of cause not mean to suggest that the buildings in question are precluded from the sphere of commodities. They were - needless to say - created with the purpose of being sold, apart from the Long Meadow, where building lot and elements were first bought and then built. What interest me, are rather the efforts invested in making the built environment singular, unique, site-specific, varying, tailored and even bearing marks of use. In my interviews both residents and people involved in building and selling discursively construct the singular and unique as a positive opposition to the standard, mass-produced, homogenized, dull speculative buildings prevalent on the market. These houses’ value as a commodity thus seem to depend on the degree to which they appear as something other than a mere commodity. This otherness is on some occasions described as a question of authenticity. Jane, who is a resident in the A-house for instance explained me how the house’s marks of the past give her a feeling of authenticity. When asked what she means by authenticity, she replied: “*In a way it is a strange house, where the apartments are not alike, and with the different spaces and marks in the ceiling and so on. But I find that honest… that one has not refined the place too much, but also that it is not all the same apartments with the same floor and the same rooms. That’s nice, because people are not the same either. It makes it easier to feel at home”*. Her experience of authenticity and feeling at home seems related to the unrefined aesthetic of the house; bearing witness of it’s being designated for something else than its current residents.

In spite of its ambiguity, I dare use the concept of authenticity as a collective name for the values ascribed to the built environment through the process of singularization. Authenticity is thus an emic rather than an etic term, and I subscribe to American anthropologist Jerome Bruner’s point that ”Authenticity is not property inherent in an object, it is a struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history” (Bruner 1994: 408). Drawing on literary critic Lionel Thrilling, Bruner emphasizes that authenticity comes to mind, when a doubt has occurred: ”When actors use the term authenticity, ethnographers may ask what segment of society has raised a doubt, what is no longer taken for granted, what are the societal struggles and what are the cultural issues at work” (ibid.)

When authenticity is claimed and sought built into new houses, as described above, processes of social distinction are undoubtedly at work. In his book “Culture and Authenticity” American anthropologist Charles Lindholm points out that claims of authenticity in the market is a 20th century phenomenon related to the advent of the consumer society, where the masses gained access to goods previously reserved for the wealthy (Lindholm 2008: 59). The reaction of the upper class, was thus to distinct themselves in seeking the real thing by way of consumption. Similarly, authenticity became a key concept for the bourgouis boheme, raised as a new elite to oppose elites: Where smooth and silky denoted status, for the new elite, roughness became stylish – bread had to be grainy and sugar unrefined. ”The new elite desired apparently inexpensive objects that were actually made specifically for them” (ibid.). As the cultural biography of the A-house illustrates, the house’s roughness and history worshipped by residents like Jane, was exactly designed and staged for people like her. The heterogeneous group of residents in the A-house, however reveal the processes of social distinction at play when claims of authenticity are made. The receptionist, who is also a student of art history, for instance laughing tells me that not all residents appreciate the loft-style apartments bearing marks of the artists: Some of the residing Indian residents working for the Danish shipping company Maersk have actually complained about the rough concrete ceilings, asking when the construction work will be finished. Also a young Danish carpenter, residing in the A-house temporarily pointed out in the interview that he was very happy about his apartment apart from the ceilings that he perceived as “*a bad job*”.

Returning to Bruners question about what segment of society has raised a doubt, we might say that the residents addressed is well-educated, western professionals not unlike the bobos described by Lindholm. But what then, is the subject of their doubt? As illustrated above, the efforts to singularize these houses can be said to represent an attempt to make them appear as something other than a mere commodity. The paradox of authenticity is thus that the authentic seems to be conceived as that which evades commoditization, and yet that which is continuously pursued through commodities. Lindholm identifies this paradox in a number of settings: “The contradiction faced by publicists is the same one faced by tourists, artists, collectors, fans and other seekers after the genuine, that is, to try to reconcile authenticity with commodification” (Lindholm 2008: 61). Concordantly, the more a house is actually a commodity that can be exchanged – for instance the A-house with its present hotel-like status – the more it tends to be staged as something else: a place with history and soul, a home and a special place in the world.

Paradoxically, it seems that it is actually in the exact situation where the house is branded, sold and thereby turned into an exchangeable commodity, that the claims of authenticity are made, stating its inexchangeability. During my fieldwork in the Long Meadow, I was thus surprised to find that the notion of authenticity did not seem to be nearly as explicit a subject as was the case in the other two houses. This is probably due to the fact that the place is currently not for sale, which renders branding superfluous, unlike the two other cases. However, the stories insinuating some sort of authenticity or singularity in the Kopytoff-meaning of something that cannot be exchanged, appears exactly in the situation where the house is transformed to a commodity. During my fieldwork, one of the residing families in the Long Meadow put up their house for sale. As a puzzled neighbour, who had checked out the website, directed my attention to, there was no mentioning of the price, only nice words about the people moving out. The text read:

“*We really don’t like, when someone is moving from the Long Meadow. We really don’t. It is not just someone you happen to live next to. It is NEIGHBOURS. People that you care about, people you have laughed with, confided in, had coffee with (…)… But sometimes it happens anyway, because life does what it has to do. And for some that means moving somewhere else. Nadia and Peter from the Long Meadow have put up their house for sale. So we are happy for them about their new life – and excited to meet our new neighbours*”.

Naturally, it is possible to find information on the price and other mundane aspects of the house by further research, but it is nevertheless note-worthy how the community of residents address the situation where the building become exchangeable, by stressing the essential state of inexchangeability related to the place: Not just someone you happen to live next to!

APPROPRIATING THE HOUSE – IN THE APPROPRIATE WAY

As mentioned above, the process of singularization continues on a private level when the house is appropriated and turned into the resident’s home. By moving in personal belongings and leaving their mark on the place, the residents are making themselves at home. As German philosopher Walter Benjamin coined it: “To live is to leave traces” (Benjamin). In the A-house, the current residents are actually not supposed to leave traces: The apartments are fully furnished and the marks left by the artists are already integrated in the interior decoration. Whatever the resident might leave behind, will be evaporated when the housekeeping prepares the apartment for the next resident. However, an informant, living there while he works on the American Embassy, tells me how he makes himself temporarily at home by reorganising the furniture, so that the two sofas do not stand opposite – facing each other, but instead form an L in front of the TV. Even though the furniture will be rearranged ones he leaves, he feels that it makes the apartment better suited for him. Other residents tell me that they have defied the prohibition on boring holes in the wall, in order to be able to hang up their own pictures. The few residents that have bought apartments in the house tend to be more concerned with the house’s singularity or so-called authenticity. They regard it as a quality and something that makes it easier to feel at home. For the manager, however, it causes trouble in the daily running of the apartment hotel: The irregularity of the house makes housekeeping and maintenance more time-consuming. The built environment thus oscillates between the status of a singular home and an exchangeable commodity. In The Long Meadow the residents perceive the standard mass-produced built commodity as something that can only be turned into a home by way of appropriation. Several of them point to the bathroom as the most challenging room to decorate, as these were mass-produced in Czech Republic and then transported to Denmark. As one resident says: “*With their identical tiles and prefabricated hooks it is quite a challenge to make them personal*”.

The personal appropriation thus seem to add to the aura of authenticity and singularity that is perceived as conducive for making oneself at home. However, tense social negotiations are taking place among the residents post-occupancy on the ways one is allowed to appropriate one’s surroundings, not least the ones bordering common areas. Where a certain amount of appropriation is perceived as adding to the singularity of the place, appropriating practices can also go too far or deviate from the social norms. In the 8-house a few of the residents have put up fences demarcating their terrace from the pathway in order to keep out tourists. The fences have occasioned a heated debate on 8book, and it has been decided that one can put up a special type of fences that is approved by the architect. Also in The Long Meadow negotiations are going on among the residents responsible for the layout and maintenance of the common courtyard: Some are in favour of letting people plant whatever they like, extending the private appropriation to the common areas, whereas others argue that the place should be kept in concordance with the original architectural vision.

Among the residents themselves these discussions and conflicts are perceived as mere questions of aesthetic preferences. However, as Kopytoff notes, behind vehement assertions of aesthetic values may stand other conflicts, and in these conflicts processes of singularization and commoditization can be said to intertwine (Kopytoff 1986). It is thus not only a question of making oneself at home, but also of restoring the value of the place – in terms of social distinction but also as potential commodity. The house can be so singularized that it looses its exchangeability. At the 8-house’s general assembly, a resident thus agitated fiercely against lifting the ban against satellite dishes: “*If we open up to these questions of personal taste, I fear what the consequence will be. It might be dangerous for the 8-house. You can go down to the Urban Plan (Council Housing Complex in Ørestad) and have a look for yourself on where that might end. My suggestion is that we reject it*”. What this resident fears is probably that the house will bear resemblance of a socially deprived place. His frustration is about keeping a social distinction of his home, but also about restoring the resale value of the house. Though the house is supposed to appear as something other and more than a mere commodity, and private singularization adds to this by implying an aura of authenticity, then it can seemingly also be too singularized or singularized in the wrong manner. Through conflicts among residents post-occupancy it is socially negotiated how the house should be appropriated in the appropriate way – continuously oscillating between an authentic home and an exchangeable commodity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Authenticity is taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary Western societies like Denmark. In spite of its somewhat diffuse nature, it is worthwhile scrutinizing as it touches upon essential aspects of interest and affect and the relationship between them. On the one hand authenticity is perceived as something true and sincere that evades commoditization, on the other it is continuously pursued through commodities. I this paper I have explored how the built environment of new Danish homes is implied with an aura of authenticity. Inspired by Kopytoff I have uncovered the cultural biography of three new housing complexes in the Copenhagen Region, focusing on how those involved in design, building and branding attempt to singularize the houses by integrating a sense of unique architecture, history or community into the built environment. The houses’ value as a commodity thus seem to depend on the degree to which they appear as something other than a mere commodity: They are perceived as more authentic if they are singular, unique, site-specific, varying, tailored and even bearing marks of use as opposed to what is perceived as the standard, mass-produced, homogenized commodities. Among some of the residents this notion of authenticity is related to emotional attachment with the built environment: It makes it easier to feel at home. However, processes of social distinction are also at play here, as the yearning for authenticity can be related to a certain segment of well-educated Western professionals. Their search for an authentic home is thus also characterized by social distinction – in that the authentic is that which is deviating from the houses prevalent on the market. Homemaking practices seem to be based on the process of appropriating the place, or in Benjamins terms: leaving traces – even if these are continuously wiped away as the house is exchanged as a commodity. Though private appropriation leaving marks on the building is considered to add to the authenticity of the place, the appropriate degree of appropriation is negotiated among residents post-occupancy. Interest and affect are thus entangled in the built environment, as processes of singularization and commoditization continuously intertwine.

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**About the author:**

I graduated as an anthropologist from University of Copenhagen in 2006. The subject of my master thesis was transparency, visibility and dwelling practices in new Danish architecture. As a master-student, I obtained a scholarship from the Research Centre for Housing and Welfare and published papers on various cross-disciplinary conferences on housing research. I also contributed to the public and professional debate on the relationship between public and private space and how this is affected by transparent architecture. From 2006-2010 I worked as a consultant in the Danish Town Planning Institute and in a private advice- and analysis-company, Hausenberg, specialized in the social and cultural aspects of architecture and urban planning. Here I have been in charge of various analyses, reports and surveys on the development of new urban areas, architectural competitions, citizens-involvement processes in multicultural areas etc. In 2011 I started as a PhD-scholar financed by The Danish Building Research Institute, Aalborg University, The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design, and The Foundation Realdania. The subject of the PhD is stories of authenticity in the built environment of new Danish housing.