

Flydende By: Where ideas float and turn into boats

Jessica Papini

Cycling along Vasbygade on a crisp autumn's night. The road is loosely illuminated by streetlights and fresh high-rise apartments that continue to sprout from former working-class land. In part, it draws parallels to Edensor's (2008, p.314) description of Manchester's urban regeneration, "scrubbed clean and imbued with design features, the industrial and class histories of such sites are effaced". But hidden amongst the landscape of growing capitalistic ventures and redevelopment lies a warehouse of resistance: the locale of Flydende By, or "The Floating City."

The warehouse announces itself by colourful light and music amongst the otherwise barren and bare dark enclave behind the Bonus service station. The dimly lit sign "Flydende By" catches my periphery as I steer the cycle into the entrance of the warehouse. Already familiar sounds, smells and laughter permeate the air, an atmosphere of welcoming I have grown accustomed to experiencing, now on my third venture to the site.

Flydende By is a non-for-profit art/construction project aiming to teach and inspire the community about recycling and up-cycling materials in order to build sustainable boats (Floating City, 2019). Through a myriad of workshops within the warehouse, awareness of waste is created, and people can teach and learn useful skills to repurpose materials. The warehouse itself As "space becomes a place when it is used and lived" (Cresswell 2009, p. 170) I aim to

is literally and figuratively a sense of place and home to a number of individuals. Four eco-warriors have been living within its borders on a long-term basis, whilst a fluctuating crew of nomads, Extinction Rebellion-ers and volunteers find temporary solace, respite and activist/sustainability zeal within its walls.



Earlier this year, Flydende By's warehouse narrowly escaped eviction. As a consequence, all sustainably built structures including living quarters, workshop spaces and chill-out zones were removed. The current task at hand is to redevelop the space of the warehouse and transform it once again into a place of community engagement and greater sense of home. The warehouse gives an affordance to a myriad of different social actions: it provides a workshop space for up-cycling/recycling goods to create or reconstruct bikes and boats, it affords political mobilisations and allows for socialising through group engagement and by eating and drinking at the bar. highlight, through my reflexive lens, how the warehouse space acts as a socially

constructed sense of place and home. I want to show how the place is practiced and how actions within these walls imbue the place with meaning (Cresswell 2009, p. 169).

The warehouse is home to four main dwellers, but has a continuous influx and outflow of people, be it nomads in need of temporary shelter, volunteers motivated to sustainably construct, or political activists in town for a demonstration. As a result, the “sleeping quarters” are divided: one zone for longer-term residents and one zone for temporary tenants. I climb the stairs made of recycled Euro-pallets and enter the open but charming “long-term” area. The space is filled with colourful couches, chairs, wall art and tangible decorative objects. The tables are overflowing with evidence of life and homeliness: candles, lights, an open walnut package and half empty (or full) soda bottles. The residents have thus constructed a sense of home through materials of comfort, an atmosphere of cosiness/*hygge* and lived-in experiences.



Climbing the ladder to the “temporary living zone,” stark contrasts can be made. The sense of cosiness and homeliness differs to that of the “long-term” zone. There are neither lights nor candles to create *hygge*, nor objects of decoration. Just the bare necessities to give oneself a place to slumber: a tent for privacy, mattress for comfort and blankets for warmth. At the moment, there are no temporary residents, so the sleeping zone is particularly empty of evidence of life, and it seems the past residents left neither physical trace nor mess. As I enter one of the transitional dwellings, my olfactory system gets a whiff of the dampness and somewhat stagnant human smell that permeates the confines of an often-used, but seldom cleaned tent. I link this to the lack of hygienic utilities within the warehouse: minimal clean running water and zero shower and toiletry systems. A not-quite gentle reminder “of a world beyond the deodorised spaces of modernity” (Jones, 2012 p. 647). But in a space predominately filled with eco-warriors who reject, on principles of sustainability, some of the creature comforts that modernity has helped create, this could be expected.



Outside of the sleeping quarters, the rotation of people coming and going is visibly apparent and demarcated. The “present is saturated with illegible traces, memories and forms of hearsay from the past that continue to make their mark” (Edensor 2008, p.331) and the space is covered with remnants from those who have shared the space in the past: alienable and inalienable objects, wall art, newly created structures, and dirty dishes. Just last night, I too added a piece to the continuously evolving table of curiosities: a clown I had found whilst dumpster diving with the “long-term” team. The clown ready for eternal life in landfill now has a second life within the warehouse. Seeing this object on full display, I feel like I have contributed, I have imbued part of myself to the warehouse, I have left a mark.



People from various walks of life bring their own perceptions, ideas and ideals to add and alter the place. As described by Massey (2001, p. 462) “the crisscrossing of social relations, of broad historical shifts and the continuously altering spatialities of the daily lives of individuals, make up something of what a place means, of how it is constructed as place.” Last week, a crew from the Extinction Rebellion movement utilised the warehouse for banner creating/painting workshops – by repurposing Danish election campaign posters. The atmosphere within the warehouse was also affected: a political zeal took over. Volunteers temporarily paused their boat constructions to work on banners for the Strike for Climate protest.



Furthermore, these transient encounters and engagements also lead to changes to the physical architecture and ambience, whereby structures appear, are transformed or are imbued with extra character almost on a daily basis. A most recent example of this would be the creation of micro-rooms using old campaign posters. A number of individuals, myself included, constructed the spaces to create cosy and insulated rooms. For space as expansive as the warehouse, these rooms thus help to create a more homely feel. A day later I returned, the rooms had added character, with various paintings and drawings. One turned into an open bedroom with a bed, red light, and walls covered with messages and red love-hearts, creating an ambience conducive of laying down and relaxing. Another transformed into a black light “chill-out den” filled with day-glow painted images. A curtain was also placed along the entrance to give extra fuel to a cosy ambience, coupled with privacy, something of which seems to be lacking within warehouse. An image of happy/hippy ghosts coming to paint the walls came over me when I saw the transformation, the “hauntings’ of things that have moved on but left their mark” (Amin 2004, cited in Edensor 2008, p.314). I have neither met nor seen the humans behind these transformations, but their spirit lingers in the ambience they have helped to construct.

A reoccurring and paramount fixture and ethos of Flydende By is non-intentional design, whereby existing objects with one intended use transform into objects with a reimagined use (Brandes, Uta et al, 2008). These transformations are used both for the creation of boats and the creation of structures that help construct place and home within the warehouse.

The metamorphoses of these objects often destined for the dumpster is also symbolic of the ethos of the community: to renounce capitalism and hail and spread sustainable practices, and thus their constructions are physical amalgamations of sentiment and utility. As stated by Brandes, Uta et al (2008, p.129) “in the developed, industrial societies this kind of behaviour is mainly found within alternative fringe groups. Their idea of differentiating themselves from a uniform product culture by repurposing individual objects and by favouring any suitable alternative over the products of consumerism.” A central item that has been repurposed in a myriad of creative and innovative ways are the Danish election campaign posters. They have found unintended affordances or attributes within the object: its material is resistant, impermeable, and somewhat strong, whilst its shape allows for sheet-like structures to be formed. They have been used as a skeletal form to build shelters, tables, cabinets, walls, political banners, art and create thermal recycled rooms for privacy and respite – a striking and comical image contrasting the general anti-establishment and inept government rhetoric that is commonly vocalised amongst the people within the warehouse.

Ultimately, a myriad of elements act to enable a sense of place and home, especially within a transient community under constant construction. Furthermore, the place is a zone to mobilise politically and ideologically. The interrelation between shared sustainability ethos, practice and creation has enabled Flydende By to be suffused with a physical presence and sentiment of home, whilst the temporality and transience of its community lead to metamorphic effects.

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