



# **Aesthetics of Urban Culture**

## **Corporeal Experience of Commerce in Copenhagen**

**A Master's Thesis for the Degree of of Master of Arts (120 credits) in Visual Culture**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the visual culture of the streets; images and sensory experiences that shape our sense of space and ideas of identity and belonging. The atmospheres of cities, partly constructed by planners and partly lived by those who inhabit its spaces, produce audio-visual material that affect the atmosphere of the city, influencing dynamics of hierarchical structures in society. Nørrebro, a central area of the Danish capital Copenhagen, is known for its urban culture and sense of community, while also permeating a sense of non-conformity and anti-commercial ideologies. Yet, Nørrebro is, conflictingly, commercially dense, treading a frail line of small scale and home-grown in a global, capital neighborhood.

Departing from a phenomenological understanding of the relationship between body and city, with influences of auto-ethnography, psycho-geography and semiotics, I examine how everyday aesthetics is permeated by its sociocultural environment; its history, norms, and contemporary ideologies—each integral parts in building mythologies, or mediated notions that project urban identities as objective truths. Consequently, commercial investments are transforming the urban landscape. Field observations are performed in well-known Nørrebro locations to study how a seemingly diverse and interchangeable environment of images co-exist and by extension creates a more or less unified sense of space. These tensions of interchangeability will be studied through the internalized approach, taking into account emotive sensations and putting them in contrast to established scholarly framework.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Atmosphere, Commerce, Globalization, Identity, Mythology, Urbanity



Drottning Louise Bridge facing Nørrebrogade



Drottning Louise Bridge facing west



Fast food bars at Nørrebrogade



Intersection at Nørrebros Runddel



Nørrebrogade overlooking Assistentens Kirkegård



Nørrebrogade at Superkilen

Image 1: Photos from Nørrebrogade

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## INTRODUCTION

I arrived in Copenhagen on a sunny day in the winter chills of early February. It was my first day as a resident of the city, traveling by train from Sweden. Originally from Stockholm, Copenhagen has always felt close culturally, as neighboring countries often do, yet too far away to easily visit. As a result, I arrived in the city with fresh eyes and excited to get to know my new home. I got off the train at Nørreport station and walked in the direction of Queen Louise Bridge. Nørrebro is separated from inner Copenhagen by large constructed ponds or lakes. The cool breeze pulled at my hair, birds were chiming in the air and the water was glimmering in the sunlight. Only the sound of the car traffic was breaking the tranquility in the air. The line of sight from the bridge over the lakes stretches from west to east, or as far as the eye can see. Walking north at Nørrebrogade, the cityscape became dense, letting in little of the sun from above and obstructing the view in all directions but along the busy road. Walled in by the architecture, pedestrians zig-zagged along the narrow pavements on each side while bikers and drivers took to the transit lanes. Nørrebrogade is not only busy with traffic, it is also visually busy and diverse. Classical architecture mingling with concrete, traditional ornaments co-existing with contemporary graffiti, and upscale cafés or brand stores next door to thrift shops and falafel stands. When given a chance I would glance onto side streets attracting my eye and inviting me to turn off course, to the places where people seemed to linger. I wondered if the same excitement could be found there, in a more laidback atmosphere.

I had walked around 2 kilometers along the same road before the space opened up at an urban park that drew my eye, not just in the longing to observe beyond visual obstacles, but in its vivid monocolored, stark red architecture. It was a colorful artwork within the building blocks of the city, and it became my strongest visual memory that day. Nørrebrogade continues past for another few hundred meters to Nørrebro station. Here, my walk was brought to an end as I reached my new apartment.

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When I first decided to move to Copenhagen from Sweden it struck me how anyone with knowledge of the city would tell me I should live in Nørrebro. It was presented to me as a unique atmosphere of art, culture and a vibrant social life. Intrigued by these narrated qualities and characteristics I felt an urge to explore the visual culture of these streets to better understand its defining elements. Nørrebro's reputation, a term that I will elaborate on in relation to Roland

Barthes' concept of mythology. Barthes theorizes that myth carries cultural significations where semiotic code is perceived as fact by repackaging popular mediated notions, often making them different from the original meaning. These myths are perceived as reality and functions as a way to attract consumers or supporters by building a legend.<sup>1</sup> Historically, Nørrebro has been a down-trodden district with high unemployment, crime rates and social unrest, known for high percentage of immigration and integration difficulties. Being an inexpensive part of the city has made it popular among students, immigrants and artists alike. The anti-establishment mentality has created a strong community spirit, and sub-cultures such as skateboarding and graffiti are a strong part of the urban dynamic. Efforts have in recent years been made to redevelop and reverse the "negative" connotations of this district and lift it into a more positive light. What authorities see as problematic connotations of myths are reversed into positive ones, such as unity, diversity, artistic vibes and coolness. These notions allude to ideas of an attractive urban culture. The rougher history of the area is being tamed, moulded and gentrified into something edited, a spatial identity in conflict with itself. By creating associations to an attractive lifestyle, investments and commerce has followed. But it is an alternative commerce relating, somewhat ironically, to the non-commercial nature of the districts history. Skateboard culture is translated to expensive urban design shops while charity shops are converted to selected and curated vintage boutiques. Artistic creativity is celebrated in graphic design, window dressing, and sales of local selected craft. It has created an interesting mix of slow and fast paced, small scale and capital city, home-grown and global.

## **Aims and questions**

This thesis studies audio-visual experiences of urban space through continuous observations in carefully selected locations. As I am living in the area, I have the opportunity to be part of the sites at different times during the day, in different weather conditions and under different circumstances, providing an opportunity for a nuanced analysis. The locations in question have been chosen using a coupled ethnographic methodology incorporating sensory and semiotic analysis. The delimitation of sites for observation is also informed by research into the history and development of the area. Ideas of Nørrebro's mythologies are thus kept in mind during on site observations; as a result, these

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<sup>1</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, [New ed.], Vintage, London, 2009[1972].

mythologies become clearer as they stand in contrast to actual experiences of the space in a discussion on spatial identity, authenticity and political narrative.

As with any landscape, what we see or hear influence our perception and guides how we position ourselves in space. A landscape produces a sensed atmosphere that greatly influence, and perhaps even overwhelms us. Therefore, the analysis outlined in this thesis takes its starting point in the corporeal senses, by identifying the phenomenological relationship where body and city are mutually defining, yet under the influence of hierarchal social structures. By utilizing my own corporeal experience of atmosphere, as well as a semiotic reading of audio-visual signs in the space, I strive to unveil these structures of power that influence our everyday lives, but that are perhaps not otherwise immediately tangible. My observations are therefore informed by theories concerning structures of power, particularly by the concept of bio-politics and the gaze, as well as of theories regarding our yearn to belong. This combined approach has the intent of stressing difference, rather than ascribing to an idea of objective truth or homogenous experience. By following other researchers who apply autoethnographical methods, such as communication scholar Carolyn Ellis<sup>2</sup>, I argue that that this thesis has the potential to be applicable not just in Nørrebro or Scandinavia, but in any given social or sensory environment.

This research focuses on aesthetic experiences of city structures, I will not discuss larger socio-political issues, such as gentrification or integration, aside from how traces of social structures are sensed through visual culture. By making these traces visible, we inevitably make visible traces of change that often indicate a process of gentrification, cultural changes, and the interactions between different socioeconomic forces. By studying a smaller local district within a global capital the purpose is to understand the corporeal relationship with visual culture in urban environments. The research questions did not guide my initial observations, but has rather been shaped and re-shaped throughout the analytical process. They read:

- What may, by using autoethnographic observations, be discerned about Nørrebro's sense of space, mediated by atmosphere and a semiotic reading of images in the urban environment?
- How are such corporeal apprehension of atmospheres conditioned by expectations and preconceptions, influenced by hegemonic and socio-cultural structures of power?

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<sup>2</sup> C. Ellis. Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(1), 2011, 3–29.

## Background and relevance

Individual and spatial identity exist in a complex web. We often relate the places we enjoy or spend our time in to our own sense of identity, and traveling is often used as a means to discover oneself—approaching traveling as a discovery of what is left of me when I leave the place where I am known. Therefore, one can perhaps state that discovery of place is to some extent a discovery of oneself, one's tastes and dislikes. In my experience, visually busy and seemingly diverse or eclectic spaces reveals how difference come together but also how social dynamics of image impressions compose ideas of hierarchies, class and belonging. Cities are often places where contrasts meet, structures from different times in history co-existing with contemporary values, ideologies and trends. Nørrebro is a great example of one such melting pot of culture, once an area for the alienated members of Danish society and today a trendy destination attracting businesses, residents and tourism. The allure of Nørrebro comes from narratives of a distinct place, a unique spatial identity constituting a conceptualized *sense of space*. Doreen Massey determined such conditions of spatial identity as: (1) not static, if social interactions are binding places together then as a result they are under continuous processes of interaction, (2) boundaries are not a necessary distinction of place, (3) not one single identity but full of internal conflicting identities, (4) uniqueness and specificity of place is not determined by a long, internalized history, it is continually reproduced.<sup>3</sup> Although the determination of spatial identity may be complex, marketing or branding efforts show urban identities as a seemingly objective truth or constant reality, describing what a place is *really like*, often relating to historical background or cultural perceptions that already exists.<sup>4</sup> These are considerations I refer to in my discussion on spatial identity in Nørrebro.

For the purpose of this study, spatial identity functions as a way in which I relate images and signs of the city to its branding or mythologies. As my own corporeal experience of the city shapes both my own sense of self and my environment, I will attempt to characterize these *conflicting identities*, internal struggles and structural hierarchies within the area. The relation between image and identity is stressed by studying a variety of physical material on location, taking into account the specific environment and its atmosphere. This methodology is applied as a means of answering the research

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<sup>3</sup> Doreen Massey, *A global sense of place*, in Massey, D. (Ed.), *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 155-156.

<sup>4</sup> Ares Kalandides *The problem with spatial identity: revisiting the "sense of place."*. *Journal of Place Management & Development*, 4(1), 2011, 28–39.



questions and uncovering the conflicting mythologies, signs and identities of the specific area of study. In applying this methodology, the aim is also to pose a meta-critique to current academic canonical procedure. The approach for this research is perhaps somewhat unconventional, integrating separate areas within the same district, and using a variety of media, as well as using my body and its senses to activate underlying cultural tensions. In this way the body becomes a lens for understanding the academic aspects of space. The area of study is highly specific, focusing on a smaller geographical space; however, although the outcome of knowledge may be applicable to a wide variety of places where the body interacts with the sensory stimulus of an environment.

## **Material**

The area of Nørrebro has been a starting point in selecting empirical material. My interest in the area sprung from my awareness of mythologies regarding a supposedly unique spatial identity. Based on observations in the streets of the district I have selected four smaller areas for deeper analysis, partly based on my own attraction to these spaces, and partly directed by commercial discourse among independent travel commentary as well as advice coming from authorities. It appears to be aimed at marketing Nørrebro as a vibrant urban district. Sites I have used are Visit Copenhagen, and lifestyle magazines TimeOut, The Culture Trip and Vogue. These are sites where authorities or professionals suggest you spend your time while you are in Copenhagen.

The urban park Superkilen, which is located in the center of Nørrebro, will be examined from a perspective of mythologies, as defined by Roland Barthes. This perspective will be applied in relation to collected data surrounding more general information on Nørrebro's history. This concept of mythology will also be taken into account in an analysis of the motivations and intentions of the park planners during the construction of Superkilen. In addition to Superkilen, I will also investigate three commercial city streets — Jægersborggade, Elmegade and Blågårdsgade — from a perspective of commerce and everyday aesthetics. Socio-economic processes of gentrification are not a focus of the study, rather I aim to debate how commercial development is visible in the aesthetics of the urban landscape, as well as the impact it has on the felt space. This analysis of commercial aesthetics of these areas will later be integrated into a discussion of overall spatial identity, with a comparison of differences and similarities between the different social spaces.

## Theory

This study focuses on *how spaces and bodies shape one another*, and how sensory perception of the city influences the understanding of aesthetics through socio-cultural hierarchies, as well how these hierarchies are made visible, or are phenomenologically sensed, as audio-visual elements interact with the body. Elizabeth Grosz's corporeal and queered understanding of the city serves as a basis of my theoretical framework. Grosz investigates the ways in which culture constructs the biological order beyond corporeal oppositions: mind/body, experience/social context, male/female. By abandoning these polarities, Grosz, demonstrates how the body is physically, socially, sexually, and discursively and representationally produced. These overlapping articulations of the body reinscribe and project themselves within their sociocultural environment.<sup>5</sup> Urban sites bring diverse histories into the same geographical space to produce an image of society for the body to apprehend, positioning the body within a network, linking with other bodies and objects in a semi-permanent, yet ever changing environment.<sup>6</sup> As such, my sensory perceptions of urbanity are influenced by the structural inscriptions of identities within, and are comparable with my own perception of identity.

In investigating the relationship between the body and the city, I will apply the term *atmosphere* as mediator between objects within a space. Although the characteristics of atmosphere are elusive and difficult to define, they ultimately influence subjective experience of space. Gernot Böhme describes atmosphere as a phenomenological experience of *tuned space*, a quasi-objective sense that modify our mood. Böhme distinguishes between reception aesthetics and production aesthetics—that is, staged to induce a specific mood.<sup>7</sup> Staging atmosphere is understood as an intermediary concept between subject and object, the object radiating ecstasies—an articulation of an objects presence in space—for the body to perceive. For Böhme, atmospheres radiates from objects like an aura, which is sensed by a subject.<sup>8</sup> It would follow that atmospheres do not exist without a subject.

The definition of atmosphere as a subjective experience is by no means unanimous. Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos problematizes Böhme's phenomenological definition of atmosphere, instead emphasizing political and legal capacities. For Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos atmosphere is

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<sup>5</sup> E. Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 241-242.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p.242-243.

<sup>7</sup> G. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2017, p. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 12.

mediated through air, seen as an elemental object in itself, and flowing freely around bodies while, as he argues, subduing them. Air is comprised of atmospheric gases but also conveys information and induces affect. The world is rooted in air: we breathe it, it is part of us and there is only one air.<sup>9</sup> As follows, air, or atmosphere becomes an institutional affect, a devious and insidious affect that has the capacity to impose political, legal, architectural and cultural norms upon bodies, directing them into an embrace of misguided belonging.<sup>10</sup> Where Böhme does not recognize social structures created within atmosphere, for Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos they are essential. He suggests that atmospheres be approached beyond phenomenology, arguing an ontological perspective as solution to escape their seductive powers.<sup>11</sup> Böhme argues that atmospheres become phenomenological through everyday experiences of mind and body, while Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos suggests that the human is in its essence a body, and its self-awareness and sense of self is rooted in space.

Thus, we are brought back to an understanding of corporeal alignment in space. Following Grosz such understanding has historically been described two separate models, naturalization or causal relation. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos would align with the model of causal relations. In the case of causal relation, the city is a reflection, projection, or product of bodies as the cause and motivation for their design and construction. Individual or collective needs shape the city and are responsible for all social production.<sup>12</sup> However, this narrative positions the body as subordinate to the creative, problem-solving intellect while also presuming the relationship between body and city to be one-directional.<sup>13</sup> A second narrative of naturalization suggests a parallelism of body and city, as congruent counterparts that are each reflected in the other, mutually influencing one another. Grosz problem with this perspective is that it presumes the human body as male and also ignores underlying social hierarchies. This metaphor distinguishes culture as a perfection as well as an opposition to nature where, Grosz argues, nature is the passive female preceded by cultural male productivity.<sup>14</sup> By combining the two models of corporeal relations, as Grosz suggests, the body must be viewed as active in the production and transformation of the city. However it is not a

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<sup>9</sup> A. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, (2016). Withdrawing from atmosphere: An ontology of air partitioning and affective engineering. *Environment & Planning D: Society & Space*, 34(1), 150–167., p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p. 151-152.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> Grosz, 1995, p. 245.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 246.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p. 248.

naturalization of man, rather a network of continuous and complex interconnections, forming more or less temporary alignments, producing the social climates of a given space.<sup>15</sup> If atmosphere is then viewed as mediator between body and city, it sets the corporeal experience in terms of internalized processes of communication with space. This thesis argues a critical phenomenology, analyzing the internalized sentiments of atmospheric perceptions, while taking into consideration atmospheric conditioning as argued by Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos.

For the purpose of this research, atmosphere is perhaps best understood through the concept of the gaze, as the eyes are the pivotal organ used when making everyday judgements. The gaze refers to an observer, while branding spatial identity may be viewed as staging of an atmosphere. The gaze is more than an individual's tastes and opinions, according to John Berger, it is a socially patterned learnt behavior.<sup>16</sup> We don't just look at something, we are always looking in relation between the thing and ourselves. Our gaze is framed by our social situation; class, gender, nationality, education, and it is how we recognize orders and shapes in society.<sup>17</sup> John Urry and Jonas Larsen writes of the experience of a new space through the concept of *tourist gaze*.<sup>18</sup> My stay in Copenhagen will last longer than the typical tourist, but I similarly enter the space with curiosity, looking for newness and difference. My research also aligns with tourist gaze in that, according to Urry and Larsen, it is a way of breaking with daily routine and allow for the sensory stimuli of an environment. Urry and Larsen view *authenticity* of spatial identity as a common and modern quest for the sacred, a uniqueness, distinguished in contrast to the mundane or ideals of a lifestyle out of the ordinary.<sup>19</sup>

I will employ a semiotic reading of my autoethnographic and phenomenological approaches. The gaze is a socially-constructed seeing, and is dependent upon conscious and subconscious interpretations of signs. For my investigation these semiotics readings draws on Roland Barthes mythologies. Myth is for Barthes a perceived cultural reality among potential layers of signification.<sup>20</sup> He theorizes that myth carries cultural significations where semiotic code is perceived as fact and assuming a degree of power and authority. These mythologies are created by

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid* p. 248.

<sup>16</sup> J. Berger, *Ways of seeing*, Penguin, London, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> J. Urry & J. Larsen, *The tourist gaze 3.0*, [3rd ed.], SAGE, Los Angeles, [Calif.], 2011

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Barthes, 2009, p. 131-133.

people, and can therefore easily be changed or destroyed given a new context.<sup>21</sup> I combine a phenomenological *and* a semiotic approach to understand space because they both take space to be contextual and relational, dependent upon the body's relation and positioning in space and the positioning of signs in relation to one another. The body changes depending on its relationship and position in space, just as signs depend on one another for meaning.

## Method

My methodical background can be found in autoethnography and psychogeography. The basis of autoethnography is the systematic analysis of personal experience as a way of understanding culture — as such, my research in Copenhagen will allow me to dive deeper into a culture that is near my own and will make visible similarities and differences in contemporary Northern Europe.

Autoethnography acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the influence of the researcher. This allows for an opportunity to move beyond canonical forms within research, which are often based on a male heteronormative perspective.<sup>22</sup> However, it also receives criticism in regards to its relative reliability, generalizability, and validity in the use of personal narrative as academic research.<sup>23</sup> In order to enforce the latter my intent has been to see the aforementioned positive aspects of autoethnography as a starting point for further development of methodology. While performing observations, I write or record notes that I can later look back on. This allows me to retrospectively and selectively analyze what it means to be part of urban culture, departing from my own experiences and contrasting them with existing research and relevant visual material.<sup>24</sup>

This research method also takes inspiration from psychogeography, describing a psychological experiences of the city, and it is largely inspired by Guy Debord's idea of *derivé*, meaning "to drift". This Marxist approach established by Debord's International Situationist Group is essentially a method of walking, guided by the energy of the space, which in turn creates a sensory-map of an area. Debord argues that these drifts create an opportunity reveal social, economic and political structures, and to critique and subvert collective numbness towards advertising, spectacle, and

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 137-138.

<sup>22</sup> Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. Autoethnography: An Overview. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 36(4 (138)), 2011, page 274-275.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 282-283.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 276.

consumption.<sup>25</sup> I have selected my areas of study in a similar fashion by walking through the city, creating my own sensory map of Nørrebro, however this process of selection is also informed by the areas politic and socio-economic situation. Psychogeography allows me to select some specific elements that draws my interest while less time is devoted to others.<sup>26</sup>

As part of this autoethnographic and psychogeographic approach, I will also carry out a qualitative analysis, primarily based on observations through drifts in the larger Nørrebro area with deeper analysis performed in selected locations. Some findings will coincide with what was available to me while I was on site, occurrences I aim to capture using photography as a means of sharing information. Drawing on the research performed by Daniel Koch in Swedish Department Stores, *Structuring Fashion*, I employ two separate strategies inform the observations of my material, both relating to the studying of visual relations. Firstly, Koch proposes an investigation of the corporeal relations of objects. Koch states how the relationship within a space could be thought of as phenomenological — that is originating from a subject. Koch's research methodology strives to unveil structures within commodity spaces by understanding how said spaces are atmospherically *felt*. Bodies of objects are placed in association to one another and are thereby given identities. These identities have an affect on the space itself, and the bodies that enter it.<sup>27</sup>

My own methodology of observation therefore departs from Koch's although rather than observing solely *human* behavior in the space (though I don't pretend human behavior will not influence the affects sensed in the space), my focus has been on the architecture, signs and commodities themselves, and how they construct a socio-cultural context. As Koch, I will in addition to departing from this phenomenological approach base my findings through a reading of the space as semiotic systems of object structures.<sup>28</sup> This reading will be grounded in Roland Barthes's semiology, in which connotations and mythologies are derived through cultural associations between images, text and acquired knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Semiotics will be used to inform my experience of atmosphere as

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<sup>25</sup> G. Debord, *Theory of Derivé*, in Situationist International Anthology, Rev. and expanded ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, CA, 2006, p. 62-67.

<sup>26</sup> G. Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, in International Situationist Anthology, Rev. and expanded ed., Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, CA, 2006, p. 8-12.

<sup>27</sup> Koch, D. *Structuring fashion : department stores as situating spatial practice*. axlbooks, Arkitekturskolan, Kungliga Tekniska högskolan, 2007, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Barthes, *Myth today* in *Mythologies*, 2009, p. 131-187.

sensory affect based on aural and visual signifiers. My findings are based on a contextual analysis where I take into consideration my own experiences of the spaces in relation to written information about Nørrebro acquired from government sources and larger travel articles. The material will be varied in terms of architectural elements, graphic design and business marketing, as well as public use of the spaces in as far as it can be seen visually. I will mainly collect material in daytime, and the observations will carry on continuously between February and May. The creation of maps and use of photography are used to unify these varying materials and strengthen the validity of my arguments, while also allowing for the reader to see the spaces through my eyes. I recognize and want to make visible for any readers the relative subjectivity of my approach, and the problems this may produce for my results. Signs and symbols have different associations depending on where they are seen and by whom; by making my own subjectivity visible and by using my own subjectivity *as* a methodological tool within an academic framework, I aim to expose underlying structures of power that can then be applied in a wider geographical and societal context.

## **Previous research**

Sensory impressions in urban space have been an area of study since the industrial revolution. Georg Simmel argued that life in the metropolis greatly altered bodies and their course of life, stating that the emphasis on human intellect, rather than emotion, rendered an urban space that was gray, indifferent and alienating. But he also saw the city as a space of potential liberation.<sup>30</sup> During modernity, the massive shift from rural to urban life led to an increased focus on the effects of urbanity. Studying the development of urban life became a way to study changing ideologies and identities in modern society. One such emerging identity was that of the modern urban figure of the flaneur, an eponym created by Charles Baudelaire. *Flanerie* was a bourgeoisie activity, in which one observed life while strolling the streets and experiencing its pleasures.<sup>31</sup> An avid scholar of modernity's mechanisms, Walter Benjamin studied Baudelaire's poems and texts about the flaneur. Taking a starting point from Baudelaire's images of the flaneur, Benjamin analyzed nineteenth century culture and urban space from a class perspective in his text *The Arcades Project*. *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940), was a collection of fragmented manuscripts rather than a finished

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<sup>30</sup> G. Simmel, *Metropolis and Mental Life*, 1903, [website] [https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/bpl\\_images/content\\_store/sample\\_chapter/0631225137/bridge.pdf](https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/bpl_images/content_store/sample_chapter/0631225137/bridge.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863, [website] [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/architecture/ockman/pdfs/dossier\\_4/Baudelaire.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/architecture/ockman/pdfs/dossier_4/Baudelaire.pdf).

study ; it included descriptions of the arcades as a phenomena extending from the philosophical, to the political, economical, as well as visual, implementing several intermediary relations. For Benjamin, the development of urban environment, and by extent society, is driven by capitalism. The investigation into the arcades is a study of a forlorn time and an effort to discover what may be suppressed by bourgeois ideologies.<sup>32</sup> While Benjamin studied commerce through the remnants of history, the aim for this research, is studying contemporary structures in the process of development. Other scholars have also responded to Benjamin's ideas, including feminist researchers. For instance, Griselda Pollock offers a critique of the conceptual flaneur and his experiences as a selectively normalized, gendered practice. Pollock points out how the inherently-male figure of the flaneur is constructed as possessing unlimited mobility in space, whereas women lack independent agency, always the subject of the male gaze and suppressed by social decorum.<sup>33</sup> As a symbol of the privilege of white masculinity, the flaneur encounters the city as only a man of means could, and upholds an urban narrative that caters to male subjectivity.

Nevertheless, the flaneur has been influential in describing urban life. Drawing on Benjamin, Guy Debord examines alienation and commodity fetishism related to mass media, arguing that it fundamentally alters human perception, interactions, and relationships. Debord defines the concept of the *spectacle*, which he defines as the everyday manifestation of capitalist-driven media. The spectacle is not derived from a collection of images; rather, it is comprised of the social relations among people, which are mediated by images.<sup>34</sup> Consumerism, because of its reliance on media and a sign exchange value, could therefore be seen as contributing factors to what Jean Baudrillard describes as *hyperreality*, a postmodern semiotic society where the world has become a set of symbols and signifiers that represent something that does not exist in reality.<sup>35</sup> This simulation is according to Baudrillard not physical or geographical, but within ourselves, by blending 'reality' and representation.<sup>36</sup> Today's period of technological development has influenced urban expectations and perceptions of what can be local in an increasingly global world, as geographical distances are bridged by digital media and communication technologies. Despite increased access to

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<sup>32</sup> W. Benjamin, *The arcades project*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999.

<sup>33</sup> G. Pollock, *Vision and difference: femininity, feminism, and histories of art*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 50.

<sup>34</sup> G. Debord, 1988. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books.

<sup>35</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1994.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*



global knowledge in this so-called “information era”, a strictly Eurocentric perspective persists, as scholar Sara Ahmed points out. Ahmed writes of the felt experience of being ‘the other’, of being noticed in white institutions. While institutions adapt to a growing global influence, they remain white.<sup>37</sup> Bodies are oriented in space, putting the world within reach, or creating possibilities for bodies that fit. As Ahmed points out, colonialism has attempted to render the world white, yet bodies remember histories, and this memory shapes our corporeal sense of space.<sup>38</sup>

Like Ahmed, scholar Irit Rogoff also challenges a normative epistemology, arguing for the importance of critical epistemology, subjectivity, and spectatorship in order to negate the illusion of transparency. Rogoff claims that all forms of knowledge are in fact “situated knowledge” (is this her term?), reflecting the particular conditions in which it was produced. Knowledge is thus dependent upon the subjective eye of its producer. By exposing one’s position in terms of visibility, Rogoff argues, the discussion can therefore be moved from the institutional canon.<sup>39</sup> Through the concept of a “politics of belonging”, Rogoff uncovers links between narrative and geographical subjectivities. Subjects and places are linked through narratives, where a naive idea of absolute belonging is a constant presence in place-making; this concept of belonging is reinscribed constantly through metaphors and metonyms, which create identities of belonging as well as unbelonging.<sup>40</sup>

It is institutional powers that canonize what belongs within a hegemony of power structures. Michel Foucault believed that power structures permeate all of society, even on a sub-conscious level. States establish norms as a way to control the population—this is a form of what Foucault’s notion of biopower. As Foucault argues, power structures are enforced through bodies, and also do the work of organizing and categorizing bodies in space. Society thus institutes structures where bodies police themselves, without the need for external punishment or condemnation.<sup>41</sup> Concerned with how bodies become intertwined with institutional power, Foucault establishes the concept of the “medical gaze” as a way to describe a dehumanizing separation of body and mind performed by a

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<sup>37</sup> S. Ahmed, A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), 149–168., 2007, p. 163.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p. 153-154.

<sup>39</sup> I. Rogoff, *Terra infirma : geography’s visual culture*. Routledge. 2000, p. 20-25.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p. 14-16.

<sup>41</sup> M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality Vol. 1 An introduction*, Random House, Inc., New York, 1990.

professional and justified by an institution. This corporeal understanding of the gaze as Foucault defines it is always socially organized and systematized, a representation of how institutional powers are prone to positivism and seeing through an all-knowing eye.<sup>42</sup> These norms, enforced by the gaze, penetrate all of society, including bodies.

Michel de Certeau suggests an analysis of *spatial practices*, using ethnography to understand how social dynamics constitute and produce the city. In this theorization De Certeau argues how dynamics of urban space become visible as individuals walk the street, creating new meanings to places that are not the same as they originally were.<sup>43</sup> As such, the act of ‘walking the city’ has the power to change its structures and alter the space. The city and its environment, I would argue, can therefore be studied from a visual perspective of everyday aesthetics. While aesthetics have traditionally been reserved for objects of art, Saito Yuriko argues it is necessary to extend aesthetics in order to unearth how mundane, everyday judgements and actions are equally determined by aesthetic preferences or concerns.<sup>44</sup> When viewed from such a perspective, aesthetics becomes an important factor in positioning ourselves in relation the apprehension of city atmospheres.

Urban researcher Richard Florida has seen positive effects of promoting multicultural and difference in urban communities. He argues that the rise of technology and digital businesses has increased the importance of human capital as economic driving force. *Talent, technology* and *tolerance* are deciding-building blocks in constructing this so-called *creative city*. This creative city consists of a creative class of workers in science and technology, business and management, arts, culture media and entertainment, and law and healthcare professions.<sup>45</sup> These attractive areas are targets for redevelopment resulting in processes of gentrification. This is because economic funds influence the market, monopolize and control mobility of the city.<sup>46</sup> As the geographically distant world grows closer, so changes our perception of what is local, or communal. In her dissertation, an ethnographic study partially performed in Nørrebro, Ida Sandström writes how community is

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<sup>42</sup> M. Foucault, *The birth of the clinic: an archaeology of medical perception*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994

<sup>43</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 2011. p. 103.

<sup>44</sup> Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*. [Elektronisk resurs]. Oxford University Press, 2007, p, 3.

<sup>45</sup> R. Florida, *The rise of the creative class : revisited* ([New, revised edition]). Basic Books, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> R. Florida *Class-Divided Cities: New York Edition*. 2013. [website] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-01-24/class-divided-cities-new-york-edition>. Retrieved 19/04/22.

commonly recognized as “a conglomeration of people that *belong together* through shared practices, values or localities”.<sup>47</sup> Sandström’s study originates from perspectives and strategies on urban planning, and ways to make them more democratic. The idea of geographical proximity is juxtaposed against mobility in this traditional view of community. In contrast to this understanding, Sandström argues that it is necessary to extend and conceptualize the meaning of belonging. In a global extension of community, multiculturalism can be seen as both asset and challenge, where the solution has often been found in a concept of ‘together-in-difference’.<sup>48</sup> Where the interdisciplinary perspectives outlined in this chapter will serve as a foundation in discussions on corporeal experiences in the city and the understanding of tensions in everyday visual culture, I will rely mainly on the internalization of spatial atmospheres, contrasting it with a diverse theoretical framework. In doing so, the aim is to take a subjective approach with the aim to perforate current scholarly procedure.

## **Disposition**

The first chapter position the aesthetic and sociocultural influences that mediate corporeal relations with the city, and establish my presence as an observer in Nørrebro with regards to a general history and how the district is presented through mythologies. The chapter continues by arguing for Superkilen as a visual reflection of desired mythologies, creating an identity of space. The second chapter analyses how mythologies are shaping the commercial nature in Nørrebros by observing a popular streets of the district. Staging of atmosphere emphasize commodity aesthetics and using mythologies as branding place, creating a unique commerce culture which is drawing economically viable investors to Nørrebro. The third chapter reflects on the observations I made from chapter one and two, directing the discussion towards atmosphere as conditioning powers, how these sociocultural structures are sensed through the environment, as well as discussing possible approaches to study such material.

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<sup>47</sup> I. Sandström, *Towards a minor urbanism : thinking community without unity in recent makings of public space*. The Department of Architecture and Built Environment, Lund University, 2019 p. 104.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p. 105-106, 111.

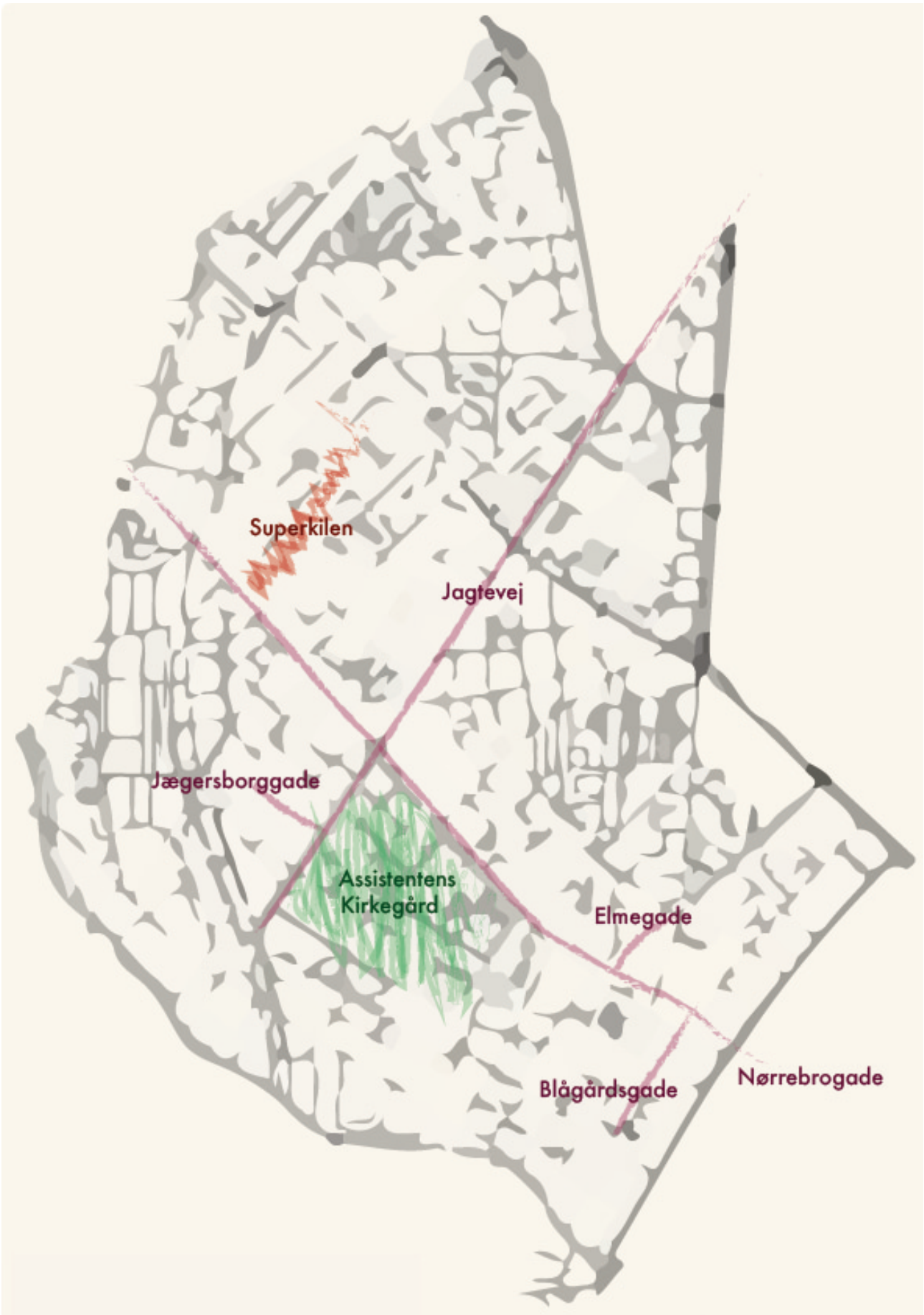


Image 2: Author's map of Nørrebro

## MYTHOLOGIES AND SPATIAL IDENTITIES IN NØRREBRO

In the introduction I relayed some of my first experiences of Nørrebro. This chapter serves to deepen the understanding of my positioning in space related to its mythologies in order to carry out a scholarly discussion of my observations in the district. During my observations, it is my intention to put words to my own experience of space and judge how sensory, audio-visual encounters within the urban landscape connect with my own feelings on-site. Even before I arrived in Nørrebro, I had started to consider my place here, solely as a result of imagination and speculation. As I made myself aware of my surroundings, I felt as if I was experiencing the city in a new light, as a resident rather than a weekend traveller. I felt that as someone who lived here, my identity was stressed in comparison to the atmospheres of the urban landscape.

### Corporeality and the gaze in place building

I have established a conceptual idea of atmosphere as theoretical perspective of this study, atmosphere as a phenomenological experience internalized by our body through our senses.<sup>49</sup> But atmospheres are also polluted by norms, conditioning the space it envelops, directing or even controlling how we should feel or act. The affect of a felt space is then understood as manipulation through a *desire to belong*.<sup>50</sup> Atmosphere effects our moods and feelings towards a space, as Grosz argues, that our relationship to the city also reflect in our perception of self as we position our body in relation to what is around us. The particular geographical, architectural, spatial, and municipal arrangements of urban environments are, according to Grosz, a small but integral part in the social construction of the body, affecting how subjects view each other, as well as their alignment with and positioning in space, constituting our corporeality.<sup>51</sup> If corporeality is the body's relationship with the city the eyes may be viewed as a fundamental organ of making such judgements.

The gaze is systemic and regulated, dependent on social discourse and practices. When we arrive in new locations we, the observer, and the observed, are implicated in an ongoing set of social and

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<sup>49</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 20-21.

<sup>50</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p.156.

<sup>51</sup> Grosz, 1995, p. 248.

physical relations. These relations are inevitably dictated by various professionals and institutional actors—photographers and writers or guides, local councils, media, architects, planners, academics, and more.<sup>52</sup> Having newly arrived in a space, the stranger would oppose the idea of belonging. Rogoff argues however, that belonging does not necessarily have anything to do with geographical presence or perceived identities. Instead, she suggests these conceptions are baseless, naive, and misguided. Yet we look for traces of signification in language and knowledge available for us to position ourselves in a culture.<sup>53</sup> While it may not be reasonable, sense of belonging to a place, to a community is a powerful desire. Despite being a foreigner, a stranger, I feel as if I do belong here, or at least that I could. With some effort I understand the language spoken, and similarly they understand me. I grew up in a multicultural area in a Nordic capital region, and I have sometimes been described as a typical Scandinavian with blonde hair and blue eyes. Although my parents have no higher education I have taken steps to ensure it for myself. In the late 90's and early 00's I remember how I grew up with a mentality that what was foreign or exotic was exciting. I would be teased for visiting my mother's family in the Northern countryside during summer breaks while my classmates flew off to far away destinations and returning with a tan and, I thought, a few inches taller from their latest adventures. But I presume, at that age I would have grown too. I remember distinctly how I wanted to experience the world as well, in a way that economically was not possible for my family then. As a young girl I did not realize the advantages I would have later in life due to my Swedish sounding name or the color of my skin. As I move in space, close to home or on travels somewhere far away my presence has never felt questioned, rather it has been met with curiosity or more often, not acknowledged at all.

This addresses not just my positioning in space, but also the relative mobility or engagement in travel as a luxury—a luxury in which not everybody can partake.<sup>54</sup> My classmates could travel because they were living with family in their home country, but having the time or money to see the world is not possible for everyone. The observer of the city which can be equated with the figure of the flaneur, serves as a symbol of such power structures. He (his gender was presumed in its origin) is described as a cultural and intellectual observer of urbanity, having the freedom to roam its

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<sup>52</sup> Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Rogoff, 2000, p. 14-15.

<sup>54</sup> Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 18.

sceneries without being noticed himself.<sup>55</sup> The flaneur is therefore to some extent anonymous in that he blends into the environment: he fits, his belonging is not questioned. According to Pollock, this is an example of a white, male-dominated narrative which still persists to this day, for instance by how women are more vulnerable to assaults and denied the possibility to freely enjoy a public life.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, I have sometimes recognized myself in these descriptions of the flaneur. Although I do not argue Pollocks general perspective, I welcome the male dominated narrative which is pointed out, but it is perhaps a too general assumption to attribute women with such restricted agency as women would no doubt have their own individual and varying experiences of urbanity to share. And as we know today, violence against women is, predominantly, not carried out by a monster in the dark alley. Here, I address the complexity of feeling secure in space. I rarely feel unsafe while walking the city, but I have always encountered perceptions that I should be weary of what lurks behind the corner.

Perhaps we can distinguish here between the narrative of the subject, and that of the accepted notions of institutions. Hegemonic power structures take their form in everyday narrative, shaped by professionals, supported by institutions.<sup>57</sup> Opportunity of movement and the idea of security, or comfort, must be seen as more complex. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos explains this essentially as atmospheric biopower. He argues how we are all part of the same structures, we blindly accept them through the air we breathe. Atmospheres are affect-engineered for all bodies to apprehend, reaching urban centers and mountain tops, lower and higher classes alike.<sup>58</sup> Yet we must also recognize how bodies fit differently within these atmospheric structures, as normalizing subduing powers create those who fit the norm and those who deviate.<sup>59</sup> Böhme writes that architecture by its definition dictates orientation in space, opening and closing spaces, it sets directions, it frames outlooks.<sup>60</sup> Beyond Böhme's mainly physical aspect of architecture, this would also conceptually suggest bodies orient differently in space, depending on how they connect to and order themselves along objects within. Ahmed writes of orientations as putting objects within reach, where white bodies,

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<sup>55</sup> See authors Debord, Benjamin, Baudelaire, and more.

<sup>56</sup> Pollock, 1988, p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, 1994.

<sup>58</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 152.

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, 1990,.

<sup>60</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 5.

the normalized body, do not question their right within a space, it is a comfort of movement.<sup>61</sup> Being white presupposes belonging, it does not mean that you cannot be interpreted as different, rather your difference will not question your place. It suggests what whiteness transgresses boundaries not open to everyone. What stands out is then rather taken as a point of reference from the norm.

Böhme writes that when we are speaking of atmosphere, what we refer to is a perception of character.<sup>62</sup> The image of a city is an expression of its impressions, meaning the atmospheres it radiates.<sup>63</sup> Grosz describes cities as a site for our bodies cultural saturation — influence of images, representational systems, mass media and the arts — making it a site where the body is representationally re-explored, transformed, contested and re-inscribed. In turn the body, as a cultural product, transforms, re-inscribes the urban landscape according to its changing needs, extending the limits of the city.<sup>64</sup> Given how this is a constant negotiation then the nature of these ideologies, norms and mythologies could also be changed.

### **Mythologies of Nørrebro**

In 2021 TimeOut, an online magazine distributing local content for cities and destinations, named Nørrebro the coolest district in the world.<sup>65</sup> The honor is frequently imparted by tourist and government sites. The tourist agency Visit Copenhagen describes the area with the following praise: "With a world of cuisine lining the narrow streets, to flourishing creative spaces and an ever-present relaxed vibe. Nørrebro is localhood at it's finest."<sup>66</sup> Several of the descriptors used here are reoccurring in other promotional material by Visit Copenhagen—the variety of ethnic food, the narrow streets, creativity and locality are all repeatedly emphasized. Nørrebro is presented as a melting pot of diversity, a trend setter and center for creativity and street culture with independent

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<sup>61</sup> Ahmed, 2007, 153-154.

<sup>62</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, p 126.

<sup>64</sup> Grosz, 1995, p. 249.

<sup>65</sup> Time Out [website] 2021: <https://www.timeout.com/copenhagen/things-to-do/norrebro-copenhagen-neighbourhood-guide>. Retrieved 20/04/2022.

<sup>66</sup> Visit Copenhagen [website]: <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/neighbourhoods/multicultural-and-ever-vibrant-norrebro> 20/04/22.



shops, great food from around the world, a city that it is fun and youthful, and a home to some of the coolest streets in the city.<sup>67</sup> Travel blog The Culture Trip chimes in, writing of several Nørrebro streets in article of coolest streets in Copenhagen.<sup>68</sup> In fact, the epiphany *cool* is often used when speaking of Copenhagen, and perhaps Nørrebro in particular. Although not a word that conceptually describes much, cool is often used in terms of traveling or experiences. Despite this, as I was researching I noticed the word was appearing unusually frequently. “Cool” was also the expression that was given to me when I spoke to people about my relocation—I should live in Nørrebro because it is so ”cool”. I started wondering if there was was a significance to this word in regards to Nørrebro specifically.

We understand the meaning of a word by the nature of how it is expressed. It is clear to me that *cool* is not a reference to the cool Scandinavian weather, rather it has been articulated as something one would want to take part of. According to the Oxford English dictionary, cool could in informal address either be ”used to show that you admire or approve of something or someone because they are fashionable, attractive, and often different”, or ”calm and confident in a way that lacks respect for other people, but makes people admire you as well as disapprove.”<sup>69</sup> The first definition has obvious positive connotations of being on trend and perhaps unconventional, the second speaks more to a rebellious aspect of the word. From what I have heard, and later seen about Nørrebro, I connect *cool* as an expression of urban as opposed to nature: dense architectural landscape, natural and constructed elements that are separate rather than integrated or interwoven. Urban can also connote a global city, where different cultures meet. By extension, urban might also mean embracing what may feel rugged and dirty—urban in that sense is therefore also an attitude. I also connect Nørrebro with urban subcultures such as skateboarding and graffiti, as an expression of attitude, or non-conformity suggesting a rebelliousness. It is, I believe, not a coincidence that as you walk along Nørrebrogade heading north you see, in large capital letters, graffiti spelling out ”Your Money In My Ass” in Danish, placed high up on a wall, embedded with a sense of confident lack of respect, expressed high enough that it reaches far across the district.

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<sup>67</sup> Visit Copenhagen [website]: <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/noerrebro> 20/04/22.

<sup>68</sup> The Culture Trip [website] 2017: <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/denmark/copenhagen/articles/the-coolest-streets-in-copenhagen/>

<sup>69</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [website]: [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/cool\\_1#:~:text=cool%20\(informal\)%20used%20to%20show,their%20new%20song's%20really%20cool.](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/cool_1#:~:text=cool%20(informal)%20used%20to%20show,their%20new%20song's%20really%20cool.) Retrieved 20/04/22.

Böhme writes that when producing advertising for a city, atmosphere is adopted from the perspective of the stranger, an attempt to identify something characteristic about the city to produce a positive image.<sup>70</sup> In the promotional material the "darker" side of Nørrebro is not visible: in Denmark, Nørrebro connotes mythologies of high crime rates and as a place with high immigration and integration problems. Instead, multi-culture is portrayed by the density and high-quality of various ethnic restaurants. Barthes writes that images portrayed in media can be thought of as signs, attributing to perceived cultural realities among potential layers of signification, calling the resulting conceptual image a myth.<sup>71</sup> When images are removed from their proper context, Barthes argues how these signs are stripped of meaning and can instead be infused with new ones. A result of this is a spread of a uniform, unthreatening, and above all bourgeois ideology.<sup>72</sup> In Nørrebro the threat of social unrest is reversed as an asset of coolness to the experience of space.

The experience of tourist and locals are not the same, as the atmosphere experienced by locals is what is commonplace, and constantly shaped by them, while tourists notice what is characteristic, unique, and different from themselves. Urry and Larsen write that as a result, the atmosphere of a city is not the same as its perceived image.<sup>73</sup> Yet, even for a local, atmosphere and image are not synonymous. I would therefore argue that an image suggests something frozen in time, while atmosphere is always being re-invented. In the quest for authenticity, a tourist may get a taste of the local by being part of the same environment sharing similar experiences: "doing as the locals do". Nørrebro is not a district with obvious tourist attractions, but rather you enter local spaces and envision being one with the community. Remaking Nørrebro as an attractive place has thereby also changed not just how it is perceived, but also changed the economic landscape of the district, and in that, also the demographics of those who inhabit or traverse here.

The mythologies of Nørrebro in many ways stand in opposition to the economic development of the area, creating complex dynamics of community and global, anti-establishment and established, local and capital. The changing mythologies from rough neighborhood to desirable and cool could be explained in terms of redevelopment. Cities gain economic and cultural energy through diversity of

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<sup>70</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 128

<sup>71</sup> Barthes, 2009, p.138.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, p. 163-165.

<sup>73</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 128.

people and economic functions as they push people of different ethnicities, incomes, cultures, races, educations, and interests into close proximity, enabling them to interact and combine and recombine in unique and powerful ways.<sup>74</sup> As a result, human capital can be an effective tool in the production of atmosphere, as well as extending the reach of institutional powers.

### **Superkilen as a representative of Nørrebro spatial identity**

Superkilen lies in an area of Nørrebro previously known as ethnically-diverse and socially-challenged. As such, integration and addressing social unrest were the main objectives in the creation of the urban park, bringing together locals and refugees while promoting tolerance and unity. As the multi-culture celebrated today has not always been seen as an asset, this park has functioned as a way of changing the narrative of a community with a low-reputation. The park is a meeting of architecture, design and art in a collaboration between architecture studio BIG, artist group SUPERFLEX and landscape architects Typotek1. It was financed by the City of Copenhagen and the Danish association Realdania88. Inhabitants of the area were invited to take part in the project, a form of what SUPERFLEX calls ‘extreme participation’, in an effort of reaching out and creating engagement between the people who lived here and the new site.<sup>75</sup> The park has been popular and celebrated internationally, receiving the Aga Khan award for architecture in 2014.<sup>76</sup>

SUPERFLEX travelled with representatives of the community to different parts of the world to collect objects nominated to be part of the park, in total gathering 99 objects from 59 different countries, celebrating the diversity of the district.<sup>77</sup> Sandström, who was present at the opening ceremony, describes the event as a spectacle, a carnival of events engaging in the objects and structures of the park, as well as people themselves engaging with the landscape by taking pictures and sharing online.<sup>78</sup> For Sandström, Superkilen could be explained in terms of a modern English

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<sup>74</sup> Florida, *Class-Divided Cities: New York Edition*. 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Danish Architecture Center [website]: <https://dac.dk/en/knowledgebase/architecture/superkilen-2/>. Retrieved 19/04/22.

<sup>76</sup> Aga Khan [website]: <https://www.akdn.org/architecture/project/superkilen>. Retrieved 24/04/22.

<sup>77</sup> Danish Architecture Center [website]: <https://dac.dk/en/knowledgebase/architecture/superkilen-2/>. Retrieved 20/4/2022.

<sup>78</sup> Sandström, 2019, p. 154-155

garden or a world expo, as it takes objects from far-off lands and positions them in the same geographical space. The objects are thereby interlocked in a strange paradox of strangeness and belonging.<sup>79</sup> This could be described as a landscape of hyperreality—hyperreality being, for Baudrillard, a kind of detachment or confusion between the real and the symbolic.<sup>80</sup> This begs the question as to whether Superkilen is a created symbol, infused with a set of signifiers, that does not actually exist. Perhaps it is merely a blending of reality and representation. What takes place at SUPERKILEN could perhaps be described as a form of commercial branding, as branding employs a similar method of blending strategies in an effort to sell an authentic experience. Superkilen appears as a highly constructed space, yet it is presented with an intention of representing something authentic.

On the surface, Superkilen may be viewed as a successful example of city planners and its inhabitants coming together co-creating a space which represents the values and identity of the district, incorporating media as representatives of the area and themselves. As such, Superkilen could serve as a replica of Nørrebro and its perceived spatial identity. With its inventive approach to urban planning and a unique appearance, Superkilen has become a landmark of Nørrebro both visually and, as I argue, ideologically. Photographs taken by me while performing observations will follow after written observations to give a visual reference connecting my analysis to my material.

### **Observations in Superkilen**

Superkilen means "super wedge" in Danish, and like a wedge it stretches across Nørrebro breaking with the dense architecture. Each part of the park has been color coded, the Red Square connecting with Nørrebrogade, separated by a smaller car road the Black Square lies next to it, followed by the Green Park and ending eastbound in a more industrial area with large car dealerships. The shape is elongated although broadening in some parts creating these squares connected by a bike lane. The atmosphere in Superkilen changes drastically depending on the weather. When I first arrived in early spring it was usually a vast empty space. Despite all the decorations gathered from abroad, Superkilen without people appears sparse. A silent empty space. The skaters don't come here when

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid*, p. 169-170.

<sup>80</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*, 1989.

there is rain or frost. The playground is most empty except for some kid on a swing or on the elephant-slide from time to time. There is one large indoor facility, containing a library, a café and the sports hall Nørrebrohallen. The first sunny weekends in march was when I started to notice the park come alive. In the sunlight the park is changed. Objects are then not just structures, they are utilized. Each area, vastly different from one another in character but equally part of the same concept. As I enter Superkilen now, I don't see the spectacle described by Sandström at the opening. A sense of normality has set in, even if the setting itself is still a bit unusual. People pass here everyday on commutes to and from work, and congregate on the benches in the sun on weekends.

### *The red square*

The first time I arrived at Superkilen, as narrated in the introduction, I only saw the red square. After a longer walk with new and diverse visual expressions reaching the red square was a relief, but also a smaller chock for the eye. The architecture was unlike something I had seen before. Its redness stood in contrast with the pale yellow brick and grey concrete of the surrounding buildings. Coming from Nørrebrogade, where the street is closed in by walls, it was an amelioration to give the gaze a wider point of reference and see the sun lit up the space. It struck me as a peculiar space, it was empty at the time, and calm, all the while the street adjacent where I stood was in a steady motion making me have to step to the side to quickly take in the space before continuing forward.

When the red square is empty it is almost eerie, like an echo. On one side of the park you can almost hear the conversations of those opposite. When the weather is nice people gather here. The skaters are at the center, performing tricks on some objects re-utilized as rails. Non-skaters flock in smaller or larger groups around this center. They brought their own drinks, apart from the café inside the library there is no visible commerce within the space. They are not necessarily watching the skaters, rather the skating is part of the backdrop setting the ambience, in the same way selecting a specific type of music changes the mood in a restaurant. Some of the people sit on the benches but most sit on the ground, as if it was a patch of grass, not minding the hard surface or the dirt. Nobody is bringing blankets or cushions, it would stand out like an eye-sore. In the evenings the air smell like smoke, and buds and beer cans are littered on the ground.

It is the skaters that draw your eye, if the ground is not wet there is almost always someone here. Perhaps it is the unpredictability of their movements that attracts my vision when all else is moving in a synchronized pace, perhaps it is simply an attraction or novelty. You hear them too, the friction of the wheels against the ground traveling through the air. But even more so the thumps when the boards hit the ground after a trick. The skaters call for your attention, even if you are not looking you are aware of them. Sandström writes how originally the skaters were not intended to be here but in the skate park a few hundred meters east. But as it became popular among the skating community the city catered to them.<sup>81</sup> It would be hard to imagine this place without its skaters. All else exist in a background, in the playground, on the swings, in the gym.

The objects of the red square appears to be moved towards each side, leaving the center of the square completely open. The area feels sparse, as if the large quantity of objects were swallowed up by this red sea. Three large pillars at the center of the entrance, with large Russian and Chinese neon signs, were one of the first things that drew my eye. As if they made the place seem strange, not just in that the objects are foreign or foreign looking, but their placement. Risen up on high poles in the middle of this empty red space. The stark neon matching with the red architecture. I try not to, although I'm not sure why, think of communism, but the national connotations and the bright red color make it almost obvious to reflect on the historic antagonist of capitalism. To the left is swings, a gym and a playground, fitting together by the boxing ring, apparently from Thailand, functioning as both play and workout. To the right is the main entrance to the library, cleverly decorated to look like large book shelves. On windier days people take shelter here in order to fully enjoy the heat of the sun. Outside of the library there are railings for bicycles in rainbow colors, an obvious symbol for LGBTQ+.

Apart from some graffiti along the red walls there are two larger murals. Both are commissioned, as one is an ad and one is not really a mural, rather it has the appearance of it. The textual message for the second one says "We love Nørrebro" in English. It feels inauthentic. The ad is seemingly for Roskilde music festival. Sandström writes how the graffiti originally would be removed, yet as it kept "coming back" it was decided this effort was futile.<sup>82</sup> I have on one occasion seen graffiti being removed, although on connecting structures, not on the architectural structures of the park itself. In my view the presence of the unauthorized graffiti makes the authorized murals feel at least

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<sup>81</sup> Sandström 2019 p. 152.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*, p. 168.

somewhat authentic in association, although visibly commissioned they are part of a similar visual language, connotations, and artistic techniques. As a result, they don't feel out of place, yet it is clear they come from a place of authoritative planning and not a from a grass-root initiative. Some political interventions pop up here. One of the boxes in the skate area has since Russias invasion in Ukraine in March 2022 been painted yellow and blue like the Ukrainian flag, and after Denmark made an official apology to the indigenous populations of Greenland for exploitation in May, drawings in support of Greenland were drawn in white temporary crayons on one of the red walls. The same kind of crayons are sometimes used by kids, where they draw on the ground and play. It gives an impression that the use of the area is not controlled but is of free use for those who wish. When I see it I remember how I used to make drawings on the asphalt where I grew up to, and making hopscotch, or tracks to play with exactly like the kids here. It is a reminiscing, nostalgic feeling. In the electrical lines atop the skatepark some shoes, sneakers, are hanging, seemingly thrown up by individuals. The sneakers are urban wear, used when skateboarding, and also becomes an index of the people who left a piece of themselves behind after they were here.

Despite some positive aspects, as a whole the area feels staged, a warped version of something that was at some point, somewhere, perhaps, real. The planned murals are almost certainly for marketing or with an intent of creating specific associations, as well as putting the skaters so center stage, as if putting it as a performance. Skate culture is otherwise categorized as a subculture, and has not always been easily accessible or understandable for the larger public. Its visibility here thereby makes some statement of welcoming these subcultures, and a desire to showcase urban values. The "We love Nørrebro" sign can be seen from far away whilst walking along Nørrebrogade and when arriving here it you see it from almost anywhere you are standing in the park. The English makes it accessible to those who also travel here. It may be interpreted as saying this park is Nørrebro, and it represent what *we* love about the district. It is not a question, it is a statement letting us know how to feel about this place, and it's a kitschy and easily acceptable term of phrase. Whether you live or travelled here you want to love it. In one way or another, we made an effort to be part of it.

### *The black square*

Separated from the red square by a smaller car road is the black square. They feel like two separate areas, both because it is divided by the road and the change in color scheme but also because there is little visual integration between the areas. When standing at the black square looking back at

towards the red you see the sports hall, a parking lot and the red bike transit lane, but not much of the square itself. Yet, they are connected within the theme of showcasing foreign objects and building a sense of community. In comparison to the red square the black is more evenly decorated all the while still incorporating a sense of novelty, for instance having palm trees and nordic birch trees side by side, connecting opposing cold and warm climates. The square's structure is reminiscent of a more typical town square. It feels more intimate with benches grouped together for larger or smaller groups to sit together, creating different rooms within the space. There are grills and tables for playing chess or checkers. And a playground shaped like a black octopus, it seems to be popular with kids. The black ground has a graphic pattern of white lines. At the center is a large tiled moroccan fountain. Although this is obviously the black square it does incorporate more colors than the red one, the grills are red and the tiles of the fountain are mainly white and blue. The red elements tie the area together with the red square. As does the bike transit road that is continuous throughout the entire park. The white lines on the ground also imply the direction of the flow, it feels playful. Kids with kick-bikes play especially around a downhill part. The topography creates a more dynamic landscape, unlike the typical city square. In this black square I have noticed more of the tourists arriving and taking pictures with the graphic ground as a back drop. Near the playground there is a large crescent white sofa of concrete decorated with black cushion looking seatings but actually molded stone or asphalt. From the distance emphasizing the feeling that this is just a large urban living room. The stone or asphalt materiality of the cushions simultaneously evoking ideas of urban as opposition to interior. But unlike in the red square, people are not sitting on the ground here, they are using the benches and chairs. It is an interior exterior, a meeting of home and city, private and communal.

From May the black square becomes a site for a weekend flea market, opening the space up to commerce, but it is not companies selling but the local inhabitants. They sell their clothes, kitchen appliances and home decorations. It is not just those who are buying or selling who take part but family and friends gather here too. People are not standing in groups, or at least that is the sense I get in the crowd, everybody is talking to everybody. It is not clear how regulated these events are, if it is approved by the city or if it's purely a private initiative. For the event a commercial coffee cart has arrived, and there is also a private stand selling coffees and beers. Because of the strong locality and community atmosphere it does not give strong commercial connotations, despite having to go round in circles around racks of clothes displayed densely. Some sellers have brought their own



racks, others are using slack lines between trees to showcase their clothes on hangers. People are everywhere, making the otherwise large space feels distinctively smaller. The 15th of May was an especially hot day in 2022, and the market was in full swing. People around me in summer clothes, enjoying the crowd under the palm trees and bright sunshine. With drinks in hand and the congregation of the community it feels almost tropical. As if I have travelled somewhere south, where the mood is known to be more open and friendly compared to the typical Scandinavian temperament. It is a warm atmosphere, both in terms of sociability and temperature.

This showcases a flexibility of the space, as it can be utilized and take different shapes and create varying moods, or atmospheres, depending on circumstances. It shows that, to at least an extent, the site is not planned in a way that leaves contributions of the inhabitants completely out of the equation. It reflects on atmosphere as interchangeable, dependent on the inhabitants and how they utilize space, but also about the weather and how affect is sometimes not determined by factors that may be controlled. Natural elements of the city makes its presence known, even in highly constructed environments.

### *The green park*

Furthest to the east is the green park, although it is a bit bold to call this area a park. There is a small lawn but since it is divided by the bike lane there is not much space or comfort. In the background there is noise from a major car road and you can see the buildings of large car dealerships. There is a larger park, Nørrebroparken, just west of Superkilen where it is more common for inhabitants to gather. On warmer days in summer I do see more people using it, especially at times when markets are held in the black square it is also easy to move here for some more space and quiet while still being close to the market buzz. The green park is just adjacent from the black square, in one straight line changing the ground from concrete to grass. It does not feel like a sudden change, the transition is somewhat seamless because of the rounding of the topography. Only if you are standing at the top of the Black Square or to the side of the vertical line can you clearly see the sharp ending where black becomes green.

When continuing further into the green park there are ping-pong tables, olympic rings and other exercise and sports equipment, but also swings and a Texan dance pavilion. The sports centers climbing wall is also visible as it is rising above the wall to the right side of the path. Giving strong

connotations to an active lifestyle. Apart from the dance pavilion, all the sports activities are placed to the right of the bike lane when walking eastbound. The area to the left of the bike lane is greener and displaying less objects. There are bird houses reaching high above the grass, these are also visible from the Black Square, and it is inviting nature into the city. It creates oppositions where one could say male sports are gathered to the right, and feminine nature and dance are on the left. The balance is however to the right side, it is more heavy with objects claiming my gaze and when people are using it the activities here are typically more noisy.

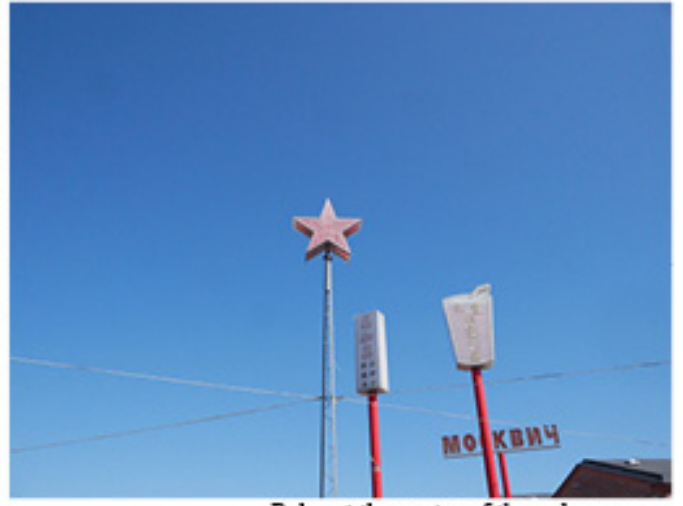
Along the bike path benches from different parts of the world are spread out, some more distinctively stand out compared to others in their stark colors or distinctive lettering. Interestingly from my perspective I find a contribution from my own country. It is a park bench from Skövde (a smaller town in southern Sweden). I find it on one of the maps detailing the objects of the area.<sup>83</sup> As I approach it with curiosity I find what is essentially a normal, dark green, park bench. I do see the design everywhere in Sweden. But I have also seen it all over town in Copenhagen. I wonder if they are also Swedish or if this one is special. To my amusement this bench is risen upon smaller plinths on each of the footings, elevating it and making it more feel like a work of art. Sitting at this bench, I appreciate it as something fun, but it is a stretch to say it makes me feel represented in any way. Perhaps my home country is so close that I do not need the representation, perhaps national representation is not important for me, perhaps it is so normal in the environment it does not feel like it adds much in terms of "Swedish" identity. Other objects from further away are more distinctly foreign-looking. The Brazilian bench is in concrete but with Portuguese lettering and printed imagery, or the Tunisian mosaic bench in glazed, figured tiles. I would not have noticed my Swedish bench at all if I had not come to look for it. As I compare it with the colorful or decorated benches that adorn the rest of this green area, it feels like they made more effort with Brazil and Tunisia. But perhaps they are simply more exoticized. The Swedish bench in some way highlights the normality of my presence. Even if I don't really see it, perhaps it could make others feel represented in the community. Those whose presence was not always as accepted, but portrayed as a problem in Danish society.

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<sup>83</sup> SUPERFLEX's map of Superkilen [website]: [https://superflex.net/files/superkilen\\_objects\\_EN.pdf](https://superflex.net/files/superkilen_objects_EN.pdf). Retrieved 25/04/22.



Outside library



Poles at the center of the red square



Skate area



View towards Nørrebrogade



Outside Nørrebrohallen



Political writing by the gym



Bike transport lane

Image 7: Photos from Superkilen\_1



Moroccan fountain at the black square



Overview black square



Urban sofa



Coffee cart at market



Bar at market



Market stands



Bird House



Overview green park



Bench from Skövde, Sweden

Image 7: Photos from Superkilen\_2

## Reflection on corporeal experience of Superkilen

Something about the park leaves me with a feeling of unease, but this perception constitutes of something more complex than discomfort, I also somehow enjoy being here. The mixed feelings arise partly from a positive sense of novelty and playfulness, simultaneously I am bothered by its construction as well as the aesthetic composition. The eerie emptiness of the red square in the mornings or when the weather is dull is like a deserted, Leninist, theme park. As if the objects have been abandoned in this vast open space. Neither does it feel like an authentic representation of the culture I see in the streets of the district. It is clear to me that it is a distortion, a construction with a specific intent. At the same time, I enjoy the way people gather here, embracing the concrete and ruggedness of urban life. It is also interesting to walk each area of the park identifying different object and relating them to my own perception of that country. In a way it becomes a treasure hunt, and how the park is presented online as well as the maps on site encourages this hunt for foreign object, sometimes easily identifiable as the Cyrillic sign elevated high in the sky, and sometimes hidden like the sand from Palestine seamlessly incorporated with local gravel. The signifiers contribute to specific mythologies, with an emphasis on multicultural, urban and community, although the latter two is not sensed without the addition of people creating a social atmosphere. Chessboards, grills and seating areas give space for communities to gather, planning events independently. Apart from the flea-market and smaller political demonstrations, I only saw the library doing more organized events during my months living here.

Superkilen invites locals to gather in a way reminiscent of Urry and Larsens liminoid situations, where everyday obligations are suspended and you are encouraged to engage in playful and non-serious behavior and take part of social togetherness.<sup>84</sup> As an open and well visited site it is also a place where tourists or outsiders can come and take part of the local community. This belonging within a community could be described in terms of visibility. Sandström asks how urban planners can create spatial landscapes that makes different members seen, both within and outside the community.<sup>85</sup> In Superkilen the diverse community is represented through visual signifiers, creating a patchwork or assemblage, but can these symbols be more than just gesture? I have suggested Superkilen as a site for something hyperreal. Baudrillard describes hyperreal as a place where the

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<sup>84</sup> Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Sandström, 2019, p. 114.

imaginary is more realistic than reality itself, a form of escapism where happiness is achieved through simulation. Within the hyperreal the trouble of the real world seems far away.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Superkilen appears as the solution of integration problems, it is transformed as a happy sign of diversity, presented as if racism has been overcome. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos describes atmosphere as a filtered reality, sensorially totalizing, where the body desires things to remain.<sup>87</sup> This suggests atmosphere is something nostalgic. Perhaps longing for a representation of a memory or an idea more than reality. Similarly, Sandström writes how community could serve as a nostalgic idea, or reminiscing of history and small scale, homogenic groups coexisting.<sup>88</sup> I have sensed this nostalgia myself while in the park, remembering playing with my neighbors as a child. Sandström also argues how diversity and pluralism are central features of the cosmopolitan city, but how it is often perceived as a conflict and therefore a threat to community. The concept of 'together-in-difference' enforced in Superkilen could be a strategy to counterbalance the notion of segregation. It suggests that spatial separation is not problematic, but rather how it might contribute to justice in an urban multicultural context.<sup>89</sup> But the population in Superkilen lived together in difference before Superkilen was constructed, and it was known for its localhood and community spirit, bound together in their alienation from society at large. Existing in a more anarchist, non-institutionalized reality perhaps. Creating this hyperreal space could therefore be seen as a strategy to control the inhabitants of this community and a way to enforce institutional ideas. Graffiti and other activities changed view from illegal to (sometimes) welcome, increasing the reach of the institution by extending its canon.

Sandström writes how community is not necessarily based on anything tangible at all, it is rather an idea of kinship and that while individuals may desire contact they will always remain separate and singular.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps identifying with community is also a choice individuals make through a desire to take part, and create our own sense of self. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos argues how the seductive impact of atmosphere comes from a desire to belong and that this atmospheric sense of comfort is grounded in recognition.<sup>91</sup> Ahmed similarly argues how recognition within a space or an

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<sup>86</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*, 1989.

<sup>87</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 154.

<sup>88</sup> Sandström, 2019

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, p. 110-111.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, p. 105-107.

<sup>91</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 156.

organization relates to whether one is comfortable or not, stating how white bodies have the privilege of being comfortable, while her own experience is how she is not recognizing her own body within academic institutions.<sup>92</sup> It is unclear to me how far this recognition is sensed through representation of objects in Superkilen, as comfort of representation has not been an issue for me in life.

For Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos comfort is not necessarily comfortable in the common meaning of the word. For some, comfort may be found in ghettos or areas some might deem unsafe. But it may also be a gated community.<sup>93</sup> But what does it mean then, to transgress these often conceptual boundaries? Grosz argues how if bodies are not culturally pre-given built environments cannot alienate the very bodies they produce, therefore there is no such thing as the perfect city, rather cities can be more or less conducive. She also argues how this may be different when the body is part of an environment that changes rapidly.<sup>94</sup> However this does not address what happens when a body is moved from one city to another, from one place to another. It would suggest the idea of belonging is solely based on cultural inscription. For Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos belonging is engineered on a global scale, an atmospheric affect which is institutionalized the same.<sup>95</sup> While Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos references atmosphere from an ontological perspective, there are differences of how atmospheres makes us feel or act within any given environment, spaces being apprehended in different ways depending on the day, and on who are there taking part. This must be rooted in our own singular or communal experiences as well as personal preferences. Rogoff investigates relations between subjects and places from the field of geography: understood as a concept, a sign system as well as an order of knowledge established by central powers. As an epistemic category of knowledge it is grounded in issues of subjective positioning, where someone has power and authority over others. But spaces may also be viewed as inhabiting location through subjectivity and representation.<sup>96</sup> This issue of situated knowledge may be analyzed through subjective theorization as a way to break through discourses of geography and space.

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<sup>92</sup> Ahmed, 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p 156.

<sup>94</sup> Grosz, 1995, p. 249.

<sup>95</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 158

<sup>96</sup> Rogoff, 2000, p, 21-22.

In its unique expression I would argue Superkilen would not be to anyone's taste. I have myself displayed my own emotions at the site as conflictual as best. It has a desire to reflect something that is cool, an expression of an urban attitude, or embracing multi-culture. It is what Böhme would call a staged atmosphere, put in place to mimic the mood planners want to induce.<sup>97</sup> But it appears as inauthentic and I don't necessarily feel that I want to be part of it. In some ways it relates to my own interests of traveling, and while it is expressed as something new and ground breaking it relates to an ancient idea of western exploration of foreign worlds. I have related to my experiences as a young girl, curious about the world and admiring my cooler more worldly classmates, wanting to take part in their adventures. Similarly in Superkilen, multicultural is expressed as something cool, and an asset to the community. Coolness is also suggested in an urban attitude expressed within the aesthetics of the park.

I identify the space, perhaps especially the red square as masculine. The reason why is the high emphasis on not just sports but I would say male dominated sports and activities. Skateboarding is male dominated, olympic rings is a division within gymnastics only open for men to compete in. It provides associations to an idea of cool embedded in masculinity, for instance popular film trope "the cool girl" being a hot woman with typically male interests such as video games and fast cars.<sup>98</sup> This could also be applicable to masculine actives in a broader spectrum. *Cool* in Superkilen is also suggested in a sense of non-conformity, of breaking social rules, yet the intentions of the park is to conform and tame the locals. While there are local expressions, painting the block at the center of the red square like the Ukrainian flag, or drawing empowering messages to the indigenous population of Greenland on the wall, these activities enforce the image of how governmental powers want Nørrebro to be perceived and aids their socio-economic interests. What is cool has been shaped by someone's say so. Barthes relate the interpretation of a sign to three statements, what is the history of this image, how is it depicted in popular culture, and what does the iconic image represent today? These signs society reflect onto an image does not necessarily bare much relation to actual qualities.<sup>99</sup> I have described Superkilen as something hyperreal, Barthes would perhaps describe it as producing images in order to exploit peoples eagerness to identify with qualities which they believe reflect signs they identify with themselves. In such a description, these

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<sup>97</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> The Take [website] 2019: <https://the-take.com/watch/the-cool-girl-trope-explained>. Retrieved 05/05/2022.

<sup>99</sup> Barthes, 2009.



myths both functions as reassuring or comforting, but they are also mediating behavior and imposing forms of control.<sup>100</sup> It follows that these myths must be narrated in such a way that the people want to align themselves with such ideas or identities. Relating to the discussion of comfort as a desire to belong.

Florida writes about the driving forces attracting people and investments to urban areas, theorizing *the creative city*. This creative city is a place with high indicators of indexes *talent, technology* and *tolerance*.<sup>101</sup> Tolerance guiding words are easily found in Superkilen, even at first glance. It has been accounted for in embracing racial and sexual minorities using common signifiers and connotations, bringing objects from far away land and using the rainbow colors on the bicycle stands. In terms of talent, the library has knowledge and education. Although there is no university in this square, me and other students come here to do our studies, people in the community can lend books or buy them at a cheap price. The library is also a center for events related to education, culture and similar activities. Technology is perhaps referenced in the forward thinking designs and urban planning. In a small geographical space, each index has then been accounted for. The way the planning is performed shows to me some consideration to the keywords power in terms of redevelopment. Apart from the café inside the library building there is not much commerce in the vicinity, if you don't take the highly commercial Nørrebrogade from which you can enter the park. As a governmentally supervised building the library does not for me carry the same commercial connotations as an upscale café with clear branding interests and directives, but of course they must have directives of their own to follow. When taking part of the urban community in Superkilen what you consume is what you brought yourself. There are no coffee carts or food trucks. Yet the expression of non-commerce still has a strong economic impact in other areas of the district.

I have argued how Superkilen has been used to unify and build an identity based on visual signifiers. How organizations and institutions describe this narrative also enforces these ideas. One location can of course not account for all the complexities that contribute to a sense of space or identity of a larger district, but I argue that attempts have been made to encircle and specify *desired* qualities in the local culture. It has also provided me with a visual material I can compare with other parts of the district and how the mythologies presented in Superkilen takes shape elsewhere.

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<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, p. 168-169.

<sup>101</sup> Florida, *The rise of the creative class : revisited*, 2014.

## COMMERCIAL STREETS IN NØRREBRO

The mythologies of Nørrebro are highly influential in shaping the commercial nature of the district which creates tension of what one would presume to be opposing values of non-commercial ideologies in a highly commercial space. As a foreigner walking the streets of the district, it is not easy to identify chains or franchises at first sight, each shop, cafe or restaurant seemingly with their own unique branding strategy. Only after a short time living here I notice how some of the same cafés or shop were turning up in different parts of the district, and how similar branding ideas are used by different businesses. The perception of local and unique commerce is strengthened in the sparseness of global, corporate brands. This chapter deals with observations of commerce in Nørrebro, sensing how economic interests shape the district. My observations are put in contrast to the mythologies narrated about Nørrebro and later observed and identified in Superkilen.

Visit Copenhagen writes of commerce in Nørrebro as a unique experience: "Shopping in Nørrebro is like stepping into a wonderland of independent and cool fashion- and design shops. Handcrafted goods, minimalist one-offs and the latest street styles is aplenty in the narrow streets of this vibrant piece of town."<sup>102</sup>. Yet again we are presented with words like independent, cool, small scale and on trend. Visit Copenhagen goes on to list the best streets to visit, with descriptions to each — Jægersborggade, Elmegade and Blågårdsgade.<sup>103</sup> Promoting these streets draw non-locals here, contributing to the economy and undoubtedly having an impact on the atmosphere in the streets. Interestingly, these streets also stood out to me as I started making observations in the district. Although as densely commercial as Nørrebrogade these streets have different atmosphere, they are more laidback, both in terms of visual impressions but also in terms of pace.

### Commodity aesthetics and branding of place

Nørrebro is rich in commerce, with shops, bars and restaurants lining the busier streets of the district. Although I would argue it as an alternative commerce, deceptively not implying connotations of established corporate brands, of which there are few examples. What stands out to

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<sup>102</sup> Visit Copenhagen [website]: <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/activities/shopping-norrebro>. Retrieved 20/04/2022.

<sup>103</sup> Visit Copenhagen [website]: <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/neighbourhoods/best-streets-norrebro>. Retrieved 20/04/2022.

me is the emphasis of small scale or local commerce, where each experience feels unique rather than part of the repetitive visual codes of chains and franchises. Some reoccurring businesses within the area was not recognizable to me as a foreigner when I first arrived since they were danish businesses I had not heard of before. A common thread of businesses in Nørrebro is however the use of key connotation relating to the identities or mythologies we introduced in chapter one: *Coffee Collective, Neighborhood, Surfjunkies* to name a few. Böhme writes of production of atmosphere through the concept of staging, that is for the purpose of setting a mood and creating an atmosphere for subjects to apprehend. This staging takes place in what Böhme refers to as the growing aesthetic economy.<sup>104</sup> Within the aesthetic economy commodities have become a status symbol representing a certain lifestyle, Böhme arguing that products are being sold through their contribution in the tuning of space, its ecstasies, rather than in terms of uses or properties.<sup>105</sup> Values produced by the aesthetic economy are not needed, they are desired, they are evidence of development of capitalism.<sup>106</sup> The desiring affect turns what is ordinary into something extraordinary.

Tourism can equally be seen as a binary division between what is ordinary and extraordinary. Contemporary ideals of the good life has become similar to one continuous holiday, therefore Urry and Larsen writes how one can argue the existence of a separate tourist gaze, since this is simply how life may be lived by those who have the privilege.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps just by chance, in 2022 the current slogan of Denmark's tourism campaigns is "the land of everyday wonder".<sup>108</sup> Seemingly referring to this idea of elevating the everyday, enjoying simple pleasures and emphasizing it by creating an atmosphere surrounding the activities. Urry and Larsen argues the tourist gaze is about consuming goods and services that are, at least to an extent, unnecessary in that they generate a pleasurable experience unlike the typical or mundane.<sup>109</sup> This excess of pleasure would also serve as signifiers of a luxurious lifestyle. Such activities are today often remembered by taking pictures and sharing them online through social media, flaunting your lifestyle but also creating an image of your own identity through the places you visit and the activities you partake in.

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<sup>104</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid*, p.5

<sup>106</sup> *ibid*, p 77.

<sup>107</sup> Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Visit Denmark [online video],: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJUurck0Hxk>. Retrieved 24/04/22.

<sup>109</sup> Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 2.

How we live our everyday life indicates who we are, our interests or how we see ourselves in society. Yuriko writes how aesthetics play an important role in perception of status. This would extend not just to status as in high, but status of belonging to a group or affiliated with ideologies. The idea of *style* thereby becomes a crucial concern of branding, determining how to attract customers and become a successful business. Style affects not only the services themselves but also how they are marketed or displayed.<sup>110</sup> As commodity values are increased as a reflection of atmospheric tuning, Nørrebro started to attract consumers of increasing economic power. Florida writing that within the process of gentrification, those who are economically strong drives the development of cities, as having economic opportunities allows you to be where it is nicer, or more fun or convenient.<sup>111</sup>

Somewhat ironically to the idea that capitalism rules the development of the city and controls our lives is the fact that it was commerce that once meant freedom for affluent women of the 20th century, providing them with a respectable place to visit outside of their home. This freedom through consumerism occurred in luxurious department stores dedicated to the upper and middle classes of society ushered in a change in consumption as it made it a pleasurable experience. Retailers would realize that the more homelike the atmosphere, the more likely it was that the shoppers would linger.<sup>112</sup> Although this development has not been a smooth line, shopping still has stronger connotations as a female activity, especially as it is referenced in terms of a pleasurable, prolonged experience. While more and more shopping and trading of goods happen online, there is more pressure on shops to provide an experience that can only take place if you are there, by elevating the customer experience on site. In this process one could perhaps see the reincarnation of the flaneur, as those with the means and opportunity, to enjoy the offerings of urban space. In my observations I have put focus on material that relates to Nørrebro as a place, or how it has been branded by authorities as such. Following each sub-chapter are photographs taken on site to provide visual demonstration of my observations in each street.

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<sup>110</sup> Yuriko, 2007, p, 56-57.

<sup>111</sup> Florida, *Class-Divided Cities: New York Edition*. 2013.

<sup>112</sup> History [website] 2017: <https://www.history.com/news/how-19th-century-women-used-department-stores-to-gain-their-freedom>. Retrieved 03/05/22.

## Observations at Jægersborgsgade

Jægersborgsgade is a side street to Jagtevej, which along with Nørrebrogade encircle the dual graveyard and park Assistentens Kirkegård. If you turn off Nørrebrogade at Nørrebros Runddel and head west on Jagtevej you would find the street quite dark and abandoned. There is an overgrown urban garden which primarily seem to function as a site for graffiti, and a high red brick wall on your right side hinders you from seeing or accessing Assistentens Kirkegård, and the dense architecture, and high trees does not let much sunlight onto the street. Looking ahead there is a bright yellow building which stands out among the less colorful architecture. I don't know it yet, as I walk down the street for the first time, but it signals the the access point to Jægersborgsgade. In early spring the street is a large construction site. As spring has moved into summer, more and more of the work has finished and by May most of the rubble is cleared out. During the months I've lived in Nørrebro, the construction has been directed towards the car road. The intention is seemingly to restore the older cobblestone road covered up with asphalt. I say this as I watch the construction workers lay brick by brick into the ground, and watching the hammered off asphalt at the entrance to the street. From what I can see, part of the restoration projects has also been to extend the pedestrian lanes, making the street more welcoming for walkers.

These changes alters the mood of the environment, where I would argue asphalt is more "urban", while cobblestone connote to small scale, perhaps even countryside or rural towns rather than urban centers. Alternatively it is historic, for medieval old towns, in its connotations compared to the more contemporary asphalt. It also changes the mobility of the site, as it is no longer accessible to use a skateboard. In addition, it is also not as comfortable to bike and even riding in a car can be a bit bumpy. Cobblestones suggests a slower pace and gives a different ambience to the space. Urry and Larsen writes that an authentic sense of small towns space would look appropriately aged, whether these are actually old or not makes less difference, as well as that the visual appearance is similar to what it could have been hundreds of years ago.<sup>113</sup> It connotes community in the nostalgic sense as well, especially when considering the turn-of-the-century-architecture and the iron railed shop front signs, giving the appearance of something small scale and historic. As such the construction at Jægersborgsgade may be viewed as recreating a sense of nostalgia, while emphasizing this sense by making the appearance look more authentic in how it is aged and preserved. The turn-of-the-century

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<sup>113</sup> Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 7.

architecture looks newly painted with in fresh bright colors, making the space feel modern still. Signs of shops are reminiscent of the same turn-of-the-century visual language, befitting the authentic sense of small scale and nostalgia.

While the atmosphere feels communal, community values have also been translated to commerce in names like café *Coffee Collective*, shop *Design Collective* and the pizzeria *Neighborhood*. There is also a "Fællesspisning" (a traditional danish community restaurant with the aim of to make affordable food by cooking big pots where everybody eats the same food at the same time of day). That this exists could perhaps give an illusion that even Coffee Collective, the chain, carries similar connotations in association. Some other aspects of Nørrebro's urban community has been kept indoors, in the branding of individual businesses. For example there is a hairdresser with a pot-smoking girl on a mural on the inside wall of the salon, aspiring to some of the areas attitude. A restaurant has also turned tags on the glass window display into little figures and animals. And, instead of the typical graffiti, knits decorate the waterspout outside the shop selling yarn and fabrics. Showcasing creativity but to their own benefit in terms of branding and making a profit.

The bright colors and curious shops along the street encourages a feeling of idyll joy. The mood is calm, even when the construction workers are building and the street is busy. Although, there are only a few couple of benches to sit down along the street that is not owned by any of the businesses, these are in unpainted wood and not making much notice in the environment. There are plenty of bike stands for parking on each side of the street. Due to the current construction it looks a bit messy although shops are doing their best to still set an ambiance. Everything on the street seems to belong together, as there is a common thread of craft, both in clothing, food and interiors. There is a selection, and unlike Nørrebrogade there is something more put together and edited we find here and the shops are more clearly directed to a white middle class in interests and values.

Multiculturalism is visible mainly in Asian-Japanese influences (an economically strong culture). There is Japanese whisky in the upscale liquor shop, and Japanese themed fashion in a curated fashion boutique.

The sense of novelty is spurred by the seemingly unique, local businesses, giving a sense that what you find here would not be found anywhere else. There is a shop selling exclusive danish interiors, a curated flower shop and selected fashion where it is either home knitted or upscale vintage. The

merchandise is presented in inventive and creative ways, for instance a jewelry shop showcasing their products in domes outside the shop, also with a color coordinated bench for those who want to stay rather than just pass by. There is also an interior shop that displays art in frames on the outside wall creating an inside space outside. As well as a vintage denim shop framing one look per window and putting it in-front of a light to create a more unique window display. Every shop has its own clear concept but they work together to become a somewhat uniform image of one specific, white middle class identity, who appreciates a certain (controlled) amount of cultural influences.

Most shops present their assortment outside on the street, giving an impression of safety befitting a small town community. Production of produce is put on view through shop windows, for instance the Caramel shop *Karamelleriet* and ice cream shop *Istid*, makes what you buy in front of your eyes, also reminiscent of nostalgia, while they showcase their craft and makes the purchase of products a performance. There is a feeling of exclusivity and everyday luxury, as well as creating an atmosphere around the product in order to increase its value. For every purchased scoop the staff handles large metallic jars and pours liquid nitrogen into the ice cream mixture. Smoke fills the air of the small boutique space and evaporates by the entrance door. It is not just a novelty, it is science.

In 2015, Vogue published an article with the statement "All the coolest shops in Copenhagen are all in this street".<sup>114</sup> Jægersborggade is not cool in the sense of urban, or masculinity. In its emphasis on shopping or craft and the demographic is young families. As such it carries strong feminine connotations. Rather *cool* here could perhaps be seen in terms of eccentricity, or being cool as prescribed by an authority, or understanding coolness as a sense of luxury or being on trend, and fashionable. At the end of the street, facing north, is Nørrebroparken with an open green area with playgrounds for children and a great green lawn for people to hang out together in an airy space, and a walking path through the park leading to Superkilen. This means that on both sides of Jægersborggade there is access to nature and open spaces as on the opposite side of the street is Assistentens Kirkegård. It is walled in, but directly from Jægersborggade you can cross the road and enter a world with trees, flowers and bushes, removed from the compact architecture, allowing an escape from the urban environment into nature.

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<sup>114</sup> Vogue [website] 2015: <https://www.vogue.com/article/jaegersborggade-copenhagen-guide-coolest-street>. Retrieved 15/05/20.



At Jagtevej facing Jægersborggade



Facing Assistentens Kirkegård post-construction vs. Construction



Street view



Knit shop



Facing Nørrebroparken



Window dressing



Art and print shop



Jewellery boutique



Hairdresser



Caramell making



Window drawings

Image 5: Photos from Jægersborggade



## Observations at Elmegade

Elmegade can be accessed from Nørrebrogade. Perhaps interestingly Elmegade and Blågårdsgade was two of the streets that peaked my interest as I made my first walk along the main street. Turning of Nørrebrogade here is almost a relief from the stress-induced rush at Nørrebrogade. It is also clear how the visual language changes as soon as I have the familiarity to fully take in the space. While there is also turn-of-the-century architecture at Nørrebrogade, at Elmegade it is cleaner, more polished, and like at Jægersborggade it has been painted in bright colors which evokes joyful feelings and a sense of being modern rather than aged. The buildings here are perhaps more intricately painted, making shapes and patterns on some of the walls. The creative pattern becomes an artsy addition.

What first catches my eye is a neon sign atop a bar saying "øl", simply and plainly describing what's on offer (øl meaning beer) but also feels very danish, both in the use of the typical danish letter but also in associations with beers and Denmark, known to me as a beer brewing and consuming country. The turn of the century architecture looks recently painted giving it a more contemporary feel while still breathing history. While there are paved car and bike lanes they are less busy, only partly guiding the flow where most are enjoying quality time browsing shops or sitting down for a coffee. The shop exteriors and bicycle stands are braided along the street. As a pedestrian you don't feel like you are merely transporting yourself. The street is orderly, and graffiti that pop up usually don't stay for long. In the intersection a sign in danish leaves an encouraging message of parking your bike to the side to respect pedestrians.

Nearly all businesses have decorated the exterior of the shop fronts, creating their own living rooms outside befitting the concepts of their brand. Even outside the shops people are sometimes sitting down in the furniture and socializing. Some shops also selling drinks to encourage this activity. When walking down the street it feels as if you are passing different interiors. Although there are no trees in this street almost all businesses have decorated with pots and plants adding natural elements in the cityscape. A Y-crossing to Birkegade opens up the street and makes it feel more airy as well as letting in more sun during certain parts of the day. If you follow Elmegade until the end you open up to a large commercial square, Sankt Hans Torv. Nowhere in the street are there public benches or seating, implying that sitting down is for customers and not for those who aren't willing or able to

pay. It thereby caters to those economically viable. Wealth, one could perhaps say, has shaped the street, those who spend their time here are willing to pay for it. Then again, most residential streets would perhaps not have public benches.

The shops are mainly urban fashion with some curated vintage shops. There is not much visibility of multicultural apart from an upscale interior design shop which incorporates oriental influences in what to me signals typical danish design, and different offers from restaurants. The outside of the shop is decorated with furniture for sale, showcasing their usage and home ambiance, as well as provide them with a use. Many of the clothes shops seem to be influenced by skate culture, with caps, hoodies, colorful sunglasses et.c., but they are all deceptively expensive. There is also a surf shop, relating to skateboard culture yet taking this concept of cool out of the urban hemisphere to somewhere else, to nature, to the ocean, to somewhere warm, creating association beyond the current place. Products are showcased on the street, they want customers to browse and not just pass by. Collective coffee has one of their cafés here too, and there is also a boutique simply named *Collective*, thus taking us back to the common mythological thread. Businesses decorate their windows with artsy images on the glass as a way of distinguishing their business, there are two enterprises here with similar window design, but I have also seen this effort put to use elsewhere in the city and it feels like an attempt at being unique rather than succeeding. In a space that seems unoccupied there are posters of political messages but they are all easily digestible life quotes rather than being provocative or call for action, with themes of feminism and the environment. Apart from the direction of the commerce there is not much of what you may perceive Nørrebro to be, the ambiance feels polished and neat. Nørrebro has here perhaps been tamed into submission perhaps.

The urban communal atmosphere is alive here, but refocused mainly through business enterprises. Similarly to Jægerborgsgade the air of cool is reminiscent of a sense of exclusivity, but the same sense of novelty does not become appear here. While there are small local businesses, these market themselves in a more traditional sense, with less flair or performativity. The urban design shops and the sometimes cruising skateboarder strengthen the idea of cool urban values. Cool is also present in terms of high end fashion, such as Acne Archive and vintage shops specializing in exclusive brands. Community is not sensed through an idea of nostalgia, while there are still some traditional signage Elmegade feels distinctly modern. Community is portrayed through commerce but also in the way friends congregate in the restaurants or socializing in groups outside the shops.



Access from Nørrebrogade



Y-crossing at Birkegade



Political posters



Surf shop



Curtisy sign



Collective shop



Street view



St. Hans Torv access

Image 7: Photos from Elmegade

## Observations at Blågårdsgade

When entering Blågårdsgade from Nørrebrogade you are instantly facing what feels like hundreds of bikes parked in a messy and tangled web. As I continue to take in the surroundings I instantly feel I have not left the ambiance of Nørrebrogade and entered a new world, rather it is as if the people in a rush there turned off, jumped off their bikes and stepped out to relax. Because it is definitely a different atmosphere here, but it is also the same. While I feel a sense of calm, there is also signs of multi-culture, the air feels a bit polluted by smokers but not by cars, and it has a darker air. Bikes are messily overflowing the stands, Blågårdsgade does not have the same sense of order, it has seemingly embraced more of the anarchist perceptions I have believed to symbolize Nørrebro.

The architecture is mixed, some turn of the century buildings but also those that are more modern and with less elaborate ornaments. Instead they are decorated with tags and graffiti. The architecture itself does not stand out as particularly colorful, it is rather neutral if not grey or dark. Cars cannot access this street and most bikers either park or lead their bike here. Most of the businesses here are restaurants and cafés rather than shops, although there are some curated vintage and also arts shops, galleries, framers and a bike shop called *Bike Cooperative* (translated from danish). Although there is more variety and has a less directed theme some shops, especially the vintage and poster shops have similar aesthetics as Jægersborggade. There is an art and print shop, decorating their exterior wall with frames, a vintage shop with a classic iron-rail shopfront sign and uses clothes racks in the street in front. Another clothing shop decorates their glass window display with astrological and pseudo-science imagery similar to *Craft Sisters* in Jægersborggade. While the street has a different air compared to the previous two, similar businesses fit in the structure of Blågårdsgade too.

Restaurants and cafés are popular both day and night time, making this place more vibrant compared to the other two after the shops are closing. There are Middle eastern, African and Asian styled cuisines. Several restaurants are using the same flyers, for example Barbarian, a white flyer saying "No to Violence, Yes to Community". Giving some indication to area values. Most, if not all, restaurants have outdoor seatings that are used also in the colder months. Some of the restaurants have seatings next to each other, the feeling of not distinguishing one restaurant from the other feels communal. There are no planted trees, but there are also plant boxes with greens and flowers put in by the city. Despite the grey urban feeling, I get the sense this is the greenest of the three streets.

Most restaurants use plants to encircle the outdoor seating. There is also a fresh produce market creating a feeling of local and small scale farming.

Blågårdsgade opens up towards a public square, Blågårds plads. It is completely in stone and concrete without much nature environments. The color scale is grey, and with elements such as the falafel stand, the improvised weekend flea market, it feels urban ad hoc, and with a strong emphasis on urbanity and multicultural. There is a ping-pong table which I often see being used. Similarly to the other streets, Blågårdsgade opens up to a space that makes the area feel more spacious. Although the sense of space is different, although it is a large open space it is completely walled in. At the other end of the square there is a culture institution, Koncertkirken, a space for concerts in an old church building. At Blågårdsgade there is a little scruffier vibe, with more graffiti, more art and presence of non-profit culture co-existing with profit driven art spaces. In the paint and tapestry store it occurs to me that the spray cans are visible in the window from the street, it feels like an intentional choice. A pride flag hangs from one of the facades, unclear if it is a property of a resident, one of the businesses or that the city hung it there but it serves as a representative of tolerance. There are two art galleries, both exhibiting modernist abstract art. The gallery *Blocks* has during the months I've lived here displayed at least three separate exhibitions and marketed them on the wall outside the gallery as if the poster was a mural. The mural-poster got tagged by multiple people. Perhaps as a protest, or displaying discontent against the more institutionalized form of art as compared to the graffiti of the streets. Thereby it could be viewed as an objection to institutions and established art in an area known for its subcultures. Highlighting the distinction of established and unestablished, to my perception also signaling the difference of the two.

While restaurants display varying amounts of plants and the community plant boxes signals nature, the overwhelming sense here is a strong urban feeling. While I do not observe people here sitting on the ground, they are using the built stone structures as benches or table tops. Cool is similar to Elmegade expressed through an attitude, but here it is not an exclusive attitude signifying luxury. While there are some similarities to the other two streets pointing to signs of gentrification there are also a greater emphasis of the multicultural and sub-culture aspects of Nørrebro. But these multicultural signs are present mainly in terms of food. Some signs of conflict between the community and the current urban development. The somewhat conflicting nature of sub-culture and established culture points to a conflict within the process of gentrification.



Bikes at entrance from Nørrebrogade



Overview of Blågårdgade, looking west



Improvised stand at Blågårds Plads



Fruit stand



Clothes shop



Prints shop



Row of bars



Cafe



Gallery sign tagged

Image 7: Photos from Blågårdgade

## **Mythologies transformed within an aesthetic economy**

In my observations of each of these streets I notice how they all have their own specific personality. Jægersborggade exudes an air of craft, and local everyday luxury. Commerce is directed towards new families or young professionals. Elmegade exudes a more urban atmosphere while still being polished, but in a more youthful sense. Blågårdsgade would appear the most "urban" and least edited and with more relations to cultural and creative activities both in terms of non-profit. While there are differences, each of these streets display similar visual codes, relating to mythologies in Nørrebro, or towards a commercial direction or institutionalization of urban culture. The similarities I notice increases the more time I spend here. They are to some extent intended to attract a "type", while my experience at Nørrebrogade is more ad hoc, more dispersive in comparison to selective. Superkilen has served as an example of re-directing mythologies to a desired affect, creating a space in the city which visually symbolize a spatial identity of the district, while these same portrayals of identities take shape in the streets of the area through commerce.

In the production of myth, Barthes states that the new meaning needs not bare any resemblance to the original. Mythologies are appropriated to sell products, relying on consumer's will to relate these myths to their own identity.<sup>115</sup> The cobblestone streets are for pedestrians not skateboards, and the turn-of-the-century architecture does not invite graffiti as concrete does. Instead, myths are reflected in commodities and commercially oriented branding. Each street represent different identities and give a complex understanding of Nørrebro as a district, yet they are, in similar and separate ways, related to the identities and mythologies narrated about Nørrebro as a whole by relying on connotations of coolness, community and politically trendy tropics. Yuriko writes that aesthetics influence purchasing decisions, both in terms of style and how it reflects our identity.<sup>116</sup> Mythologies both serve as comfort as consumers believe they are shaping their own identity by being part of something special. The ecstasies of these objects are used to set the stage of something that is cool, urban, and worldly, relating them to activities consumers want to take part in or qualities we want to see in ourselves. The branding and marketing about Nørrebro also functions as a stamp of quality as authorities prescribe what is cool, thus coolness becomes hegemony. In Superkilen, cool is established as something masculine as it emphasize activities with male

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<sup>115</sup> Barthes (2007), p. 164.

<sup>116</sup> Yuriko (2007)

connotations. This idea of cool is problematized in the commercial streets. If I described Superkilen as masculine, Jægersborggade in contrast is inherently feminine. Shopping connotes to female, but the direction of the businesses here also relate to craft, family life and the home. Most clothes shops only sell attire for women and children. Instead of graffiti, urban creativity is present in the less invasive knitted decorations of waterspouts. The direction of the commerce and the activities in Elmegade and Blågårdsgade do not have as strong gendered direction. While shopping as pleasure has mainly female connotations, perhaps the neutral feeling of these spaces is a result of a cooler, masculine energy. Elmegade and Blågårdsgade reflects more of the urban culture and attitudes, they exist more frequently in the branding of businesses, as well as being more present in the architecture of the streets. When Pollock refers to male dominated narrative as a threatening experience for women, perhaps this is a suggestion that feminine connotations of space is less threatening. Balancing these oppositions changes the perception of space. In this perceptions urban opposes nature in the same way male opposes female.

Community at Jægersborggade is also presented in a more traditional sense compared to Superkilen, relating to family and to small town communities. Elmegade and Blågårdsgade more closely resemble the urban and communal attitudes discussed in Superkilen, while still being reshaped within commodity aesthetics and connotations. Multicultural coexistence is mainly seen in terms of commerce: in restaurants specializing in ethnic food, or in inspiration of designs. While Nørrebro is described as the most multi-cultural area in Denmark it seems to me that it is white people who take part in the pleasures of the district. This instinctual perception fits with the Florida's theory of redevelopment chasing out the poor in favor of the economically strong.<sup>117</sup> It seems that the visual signifiers of multi-culture, as it is seen in Superkilen through dispersed objects, and as it is present as commodity is enough to carry the validity of the branding, and giving at least a superficial sense of authenticity. Despite this, businesses in the districts have made an effort to provide customers with a sense of authenticity and uniqueness. Böhme writes how staging atmosphere may increase product value by infusing it with something beyond the object itself.<sup>118</sup> Thus creating an experience related to the purchase, or a sense of being apart of something. As a consumer we may believe we are making a statement, for instance against authority and capitalism, but in reality the sign consumed is a product of capitalism and by taking part we buy into the same conformity. Society is

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<sup>117</sup> Florida, *Class-Divided Cities: New York Edition*. 2013.

<sup>118</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 27.



happy with this as the original myth posed a threat to order, but as this image has been turned it now benefits government intentions.<sup>119</sup> The display windows of shops are personalized and sometimes appear hand painted, however similar designs re-occur for different businesses, making the ambience feel less unique when it is recognized. This occurs both in shops with similar merchandise and across different genres of commerce. This elevation from everyday occurrences align with the gaze of the tourist as someone looking to take part in unique, out-of-the-ordinary experiences.<sup>120</sup> But in Nørrebro you don't visit typical touristic spaces, you enter to experience locality. Urry and Larsen argue that the gaze of the tourist is stereotypical, looking for what it is they expect to see. Thinking what certain places are known for are reasons to visit.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps the length of time I spent here has helped me see these superficial conceptions more clearly, but it is not just the tourist who decide where they want to visit based on stereotypes and conceptions, it is often how people with mobility choose where they want to live as well. Here we cannot neglect to mention the importance of trends, and different interests of individuals.

In the tourist information about Nørrebro, the district is often described by stating its narrow streets. *Narrow* provides connotations to small scale, or unestablished in relation to parade streets. Narrow streets of cities often comes with low light as sun cannot reach the pedestrians. The latter I sense from Nørrebro, although not due to narrow winding streets for to me they are often quite broad, but the dense architecture. To feel sunlight you have to understand at what times of day the sun will be exposed in certain parts of the streets. Pedestrians walking the city are more likely to find a spot to sit down and take in the city in the role of a customer which illustrate gentrification processes of how money monopolize space. Florida describes that as areas become attractive or valuable at the overall market, redevelopment spurs, allowing those of means, those who have mobility of movement to cluster in these attractive spaces. This is how cities become stomping grounds for the wealthy.<sup>122</sup> Comparably the three "cooler" streets suggest a class difference through changes of pace compared to Nørrebrogade, by stepping away from busy transport roads to more contemplative spaces where you are intended to slow down and take in your surroundings, much like the culturally conscious flaneur. The historical representation of the flaneur as well as ideals of living a

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<sup>119</sup> Barthes, 2007, p. 164-167.

<sup>120</sup> Urry & Larsen (2011)

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>122</sup> Florida (2014)

continuous never-ending holiday both suggests an abundance of time. The ambience in the laid back streets gives the impression of luxury, and the marketing of the streets in tourist pages functions as an assurance of quality for visitors.

The three commercial streets I have observed display capitalist-driven visual codes which impacts our ideas normality by their presence in everyday life. Debord argues this type of commodity fetishism relates to growing alienation, sprout out of images mediating social relations rather than what he perceives as genuine bonds. Consumer society encourages culture to re-appropriate or re-invent itself, continuously repackaging old material, leading to homogenization of culture.<sup>123</sup> Does this mean authentic local cultures cannot exist when exposed to capitalism? We have seen how commerce reshapes societies through economical interests, attracting outsiders to the community. Extending it, and making it different from what it was before. In Superkilen, efforts have been made to include the inhabitants of the communities in envisioning the park, they have also created it as an open social space for people to congregate together, an open community where economic strength is not an equating factor to take part in space. Although there is a café in the library it does, to me, not have the same connotations of profit driven commerce as it is part of a public institution. The flea markets on weekends in the black square are not organized by commercial business, but there is also no pressure to purchase to take part, there is no decorum of needing to buy something to stay in the space. In contrast, community in the commercial streets is adapted through the names of businesses, or by being places where people meet to consume drinks, or food, together.

Despite this, inhabiting Nørrebro feels like being part of something unique. As someone who enjoys the quirky business ideas and thrive in exploring spaces I enjoy the unpredictability. After some months living here I walk the streets with ease, not needing to look at my phone to see where I am going, I pass boutiques I mean to go into or restaurants I want to try but did not get to yet. For being a relatively small city district the buzz is tangible and energetic. Melting pots like Nørrebro, where life happens, are an attractive force where those with means are willing to pay to take part. Perhaps providing you with a feeling of FOMO, or "fear of missing out" if you do not.

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<sup>123</sup> Debord, *Society of the spectacle*, 1988.

## EXPERIENCE OF CONTEMPORARY URBANITY

Performing observations in Nørrebro have led to a discussion on the relationship between perceived mythologies in contrast with a corporeal experience of the city. This chapter reflects on the difference of still image and constant and ever-changing movement of urban atmospheric environment. The visual signifiers I have studied have taken diverse forms in different parts of the city, illuminating the extent of atmospheric production from various perspectives. The chapter also addresses my role as observer, taking part in spatial practices, immersed within the urban fabric. The outcomes of my observations are taken in relation to my experience of contemporary urbanity, and how aesthetics of urbanity takes place in Nørrebro. Within this discussion, I address my role as an observer, and the potential role of subjective reiteration in scholarly research.

### Corporeal experience of urban aesthetics

Choices of where we wish to spend our time will always be individual, the environments one enjoys, while being subject to influence, also highly depends on personal interests. Yuriko argues how aesthetics takes part in everyday decisions, our purchasing choices and developing something like a personal style.<sup>124</sup> This does not necessarily only reflect commodities, but also which places we choose to visit, and perhaps where we want to be seen by others. As such, these aesthetic choices align with perceptions of identity and creating an image of ourselves. By extension, atmosphere can be used to tune moods, but also shape behavior and desire.

De Certeau theorized the impact of walking the streets of a city, arguing that each visit takes part in shaping the ideals and norms of the place.<sup>125</sup> Such *spatial practices* are a continuing constitution and production of sense of space. This experience is broken up into countless tiny deportations, where relationships and intersections intertwine to create an urban fabric.<sup>126</sup> During my observations, or each time I take part of urbanity I also shape, if only just a bit, what the city is. Although we each may contribute, I have argued how the foot print of the economically powerful

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<sup>124</sup> Yuriko, 2011, p, 56-57.

<sup>125</sup> De Certeau, 2011, p. 117.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid*, p. 103.

carries greater weight in changing the environment and demographics of the city. Florida has attributed such potency of regeneration to the creative city.<sup>127</sup> While the common figure of modernity, the flaneur, may be viewed as reflection of such power, perhaps the bourgeois contemporary equivalent is Florida's creative professional. According to Pollock, the flaneur serves as symbol of bourgeois ideology and socio-economic privilege of white masculinity, in freedom of movement, of observing without interacting, consuming through a sight rarely acknowledged.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, the economically powerful today are the ones with greater opportunity to enjoy, and take in the urban landscape.

In Superkilen planners have by shaping the meaning of *community* also shaped the behavior of the community in the area. By giving some power of decision to the inhabitants, incorporating them in the planning, they might feel more like they are part of the renewal. Much like a parent might introduce a reluctant child to bedtime by letting them pick the bedtime story. Foucault argues how biopower impact all aspects of life, relinquishing the need of legal power, such as police, as it is easier to subdue than use force as means of control.<sup>129</sup> Grosz similarly argues how the structure and form of a city provide the context of social rules and expectations. Norms are internalized or habituated and as such ensure social conformity, or at least position those of the social margins at a safe distance. As such Grosz argues the city as the center of which production and circulation of power occurs.<sup>130</sup> The strategies at Superkilen supposedly serve to reduce alienation from society and government institutions by implementing a "together-in-difference" concept, creating a spatial identity where ideas of belonging exists as dispersed and diverse objects.

While the gesture is there, it is unclear what these physical objects actually offered the population of the community, or if it is just a theme park or spectacle. Sandström argues this as a form of minor architecture where the inhabitants take part "finishing" the designs.<sup>131</sup> In Superkilen communities do impact the atmosphere of space by shaping and reshaping its usage. They skated here so a skatepark was incorporated, they kept writing graffiti so it was at some point allowed to take place,

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<sup>127</sup> Florida *Class-Divided Cities: New York Edition*. 2013.

<sup>128</sup> Pollock, 1988, p. 67.

<sup>129</sup> Foucault, *The birth of the clinic: an archaeology of medical perception*, 1994.

<sup>130</sup> Grosz, 1995, p. 241-242.

<sup>131</sup> Sandström, 2019.

and they draw on the ground to play, and as such create new usages of space through everyday processes. These freedoms creates less reason to rebel, and these are freedoms I have not noticed in the same way in the commercial streets I have studied, except partly at Blågårdsgade. Although I noticed little opposition against this institutionalization. One example is the art gallery in Blågårdsgade. The gallery's promotion using connotations to a mural could be seen as an attempt to bridge the fine arts with the less established graffiti, the predominant urban art expression of the area, and justifying its place. To tag the faux mural could in turn be viewed as opposition against the institution, pointing out to those who pass by the falseness of the gallery's message. When I pass here, I note the obstruction, an iconoclasm of sorts, and perceive it as an objection towards the institutional art in favor of subculture. The opposition of established, by an authority, and the unestablished, coming from the people, is highlighted and determines the differences of the two.

According to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos affects are regularly used and exploited in service of consumerism, legal obedience and political placation, and are better controlled when they represent a warm and cozy, cool and embracing, atmospheric luxury.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, the redevelopment in Nørrebro has created a presumed safety through increased governmental control. The commercial streets I have studied have been described as cozy, laidback and cool. Becoming a place of homogenous comfort and thereby it feels safer, without looking closely at statistics to see if this is actually true. It is unclear what this means for those who lived here before, who presumably, were forced out in the changing economical environment. But if the communities who took part in building Superkilen can no longer live here, what does the objects they chose stand for? Around me "non-Scandinavian" appearance are in a minority.

Instead multi-culture is seen in the offers of food. It is the white credentials of a limited multi-culture. It is cool and embracing. It is cozy, and mostly clean. The signifiers have been transformed into ways of commerce, both directly through shops but also as a way to sell a lifestyle of small-scale, cool and urban. Joining the community in Nørrebro as an outsider does, to an extent, entail taking part in commerce, by entering the community through local businesses, buying local produce or going for a coffee and a pastry in a local café. As such, you could say you are buying your place in the community by investing money here. As newly arrived in a space, Urry and Larsen argue how the gaze of the tourist are guided by professionals, as such we often see what we expect to see,

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<sup>132</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 158.

we do not necessarily expand our minds to more than we already now.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Böhme writes how when referring to atmosphere of space one usually refer to a perception of character.<sup>134</sup> The character we presume is not necessarily a true image because we live in the space. It is easy to accept assumptions of spatial identity provided to us through mythologies. We see what we are told to see.

However opportunities may change, a Eurocentric perspective persists by extending the reach of institutions. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos would argue such perceptions as part of an engineered and over-encompassing atmosphere, predominantly felt as comfort, an affect of belonging.<sup>135</sup> Despite efforts to include multicultural communities in the district perhaps the changing environment becomes something where bodies no longer recognize themselves. What then is left of the atmospheric community spirit and sense of belonging? Because we do have a desire to belong, but this desire must be a negotiation, not something acknowledged without thought. It is a powerful pressure from society to prescribe to norms, but there are also those who go against it, and if they are powerful enough norms are eligible to change. Considering the perceived anonymous and impersonal qualities of urban space, building a coherent neighborhood that brings the inhabitants together, creating a feeling of belonging, or connotations to belonging by evoking a small town or rural branding concept. Simmel has written how the city is inherently alienating, existing as opposition to the traditional sense of community.<sup>136</sup> But this definition of urban and rural as oppositions is not a true image. Böhme writes how nature unfolds in the city too, having its own characteristics, transpiring at odds with its planning and structure.<sup>137</sup> Although Nørrebro has served as an example where natural elements such as trees or grass are often separated from built structure providing an increased sense of urbanity, it has also served as an example where small scale, local, or even rural, values are sought after and sometimes attained within the limits of construction.

In the global world we live in today, the cultural inscriptions of a body is not only local, it is also formed by influences online, open to anyone in any given geographical location. As commerce to a

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<sup>133</sup> Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 10.

<sup>134</sup> Böhme, 2017, p. 28.

<sup>135</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 156.

<sup>136</sup> Simmel, G. *Metropolis and Mental Life*, 1903.

<sup>137</sup> Böhme, 2017, p, 127

large extent happens online, physical shops must adapt in order to remain competitive. In Nørrebro, what I see is an increased emphasis on local, both in terms of production but also in terms of relating the products within local ideologies. While there is a great offering of global commodities, there is also a great emphasis on Danish or even Nørrebro specific produce. Such as local breweries, products by local artists or vintage clothes redesigned in the shops by the staff. Local in terms of ideologies is what I would describe as reflecting mythologies of Nørrebro through keywords I have identified. Such as community, urban, creativity to name only a few. These are continuously appropriated in business ventures all over the district. Grosz writes how a digital, informational revolution is changing how cities are lived today, a hyperreal transformation of geographical space to a screen interface where distance and depth become pure surface, inevitably affecting, or infecting corporeal existence where disjointed individuals co-exist.<sup>138</sup> While digital development often means more choices, living outside the city and working digitally for example, the development is instead an increased locality. Grosz doesn't take into account that when places are where unsuspected meetings or experiences happen they are attractive places to live and be.

The increased mobility also makes it more important for cities to brand themselves in a competitive market. Within this branding, it is increasingly common to conceptualize an image for investors to apprehend.<sup>139</sup> It is an image, where sense of vision is reduced to limited features. In branding and editing everyday aesthetics, these could be seen as a result of hyperreality, where spatial identity is enforced to create a unified, unreal, image. Urry and Larsen sees the hyperreal in what they describe as the *performative turn*: a multi-sensuous experience beyond sightseeing.<sup>140</sup> In Superkilen it has been narrated with an emphasis on the locals, but performed for a global audience. The experience of Superkilen is both visual and auditory, implementing physical, conceptualized ideas of the cool, urban, global community. When putting the hyperreal, performative aspects of Superkilen side by side with the commercial streets I argue how although little commerce happen within the limits of the park, Superkilen plays an important part in enforcing mythological ideas of the district and as consequence one more easily subsume to capitalist structures.

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<sup>138</sup> Grosz, 1995, p. 251-252.

<sup>139</sup> Kalandides, The problem with spatial identity: revisiting the "sense of place." 2011.

<sup>140</sup> Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 11.

I do enjoy taking part of these environments. As people gather around activities it creates a buzz of excitement. As I was observing, it never felt identical. There were always new impressions. In Nørrebro, businesses have their own expression and ingenuity, while my experience of larger corporations are to make each customer experience exactly the same. The unpredictability feels authentic. The atmosphere changes because of initiative from inhabitant, taking part in filling the spaces with life and happenings. Böhme writes how atmospheres do not remain identical over time, but if measured over a longer timeframe atmospheres can appear the same through the distinction of a certain character.<sup>141</sup> They are perceived in a similar way, they are not the same. The conflicting feeling I have possibly reflect my own role as part of this conflict between power and subjects, where I am complicit in changing the environment, and perhaps not for the better. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos argues an overarching aspect of atmosphere, relying on both animate and inanimate bodies to stay complicit in an infinite phenomenological future.<sup>142</sup> Implying an eternal continuum of ontological perception of sensed atmosphere. While incorporating and expanding its canon similar power structures do stay in place, however norms and ideologies are also subject to change.

### **Addressing subjectivity**

A side effect of performing this study, using new application of methodologies, has also started a discussion on the importance of subjective reflection of our surroundings, by internalizing sensory impressions carrying a contemplative argumentation of atmospheric affect. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos describe how atmosphere through its affect reach us earlier than consciousness, making us unable to perceive it, while at the same time capturing the future.<sup>143</sup> De Certeus idea of walks having the power to change the environment of the streets would oppose this idea of the future being static. Claiming that not only, do subjects have the agency to change the atmosphere of a space with their presence, scholars also need to be close to study it, they need to be immersed.<sup>144</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos sees issues with this immersion. He argues how atmosphere remains outside the individual or collective consciousness, writing that the difficulty of apprehending atmosphere lies in its supra-corporeal emergence that goes beyond individual apperception or

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<sup>141</sup> Böhme, 2017, p, 30.

<sup>142</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 156.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid*, p. 157.

<sup>144</sup> De Certeu, 2011, p. 117.



subjectivity. The fact that an atmosphere is engineered makes it ontologically relevant.<sup>145</sup> To take an ontological approach would position a researcher in a top-down perspective, in opposition to immersion. In turn, Grosz writes that while it is important to recognize the systemic, positivist, narrative in the corporeal apprehension of space, this does not account for the subjective positioning within such systemic structure.<sup>146</sup> This idea of alignment in space gives subjects different freedoms, or lack of options, what to align with, which may provide a sort of comfort or discomfort of self.

According to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos atmospheres are binding due to this comfort, writing that affect makes bodies willfully place themselves in a state of belonging.<sup>147</sup> Yet, I don't feel that I cannot be critical of the spaces I enter. That I feel I belong more in some places than others. But I have also felt a desire to take part, to belong. Perhaps the answer to not succumbing to atmosphere is, more importantly, to be suspicious of comfort. The atmospheric bubble makes itself, at least somewhat, visible in the internalization of sensory apprehensions and emotional experiences, asking why I belong here, or why don't I. This belonging is based on perception of reality. Rogoff arguing that if identity has no permanence, spatial or individual, we cannot absolutely and decisively belong anywhere. If body and city is subject to a continued discussion, it is never stagnant but always in flux.<sup>148</sup> However, whether the perception is real or not, an image can be comforting, an assurance that things are under control in our safe atmospheric bubble. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos suggest an ontological withdrawal from atmosphere, but states that if we successfully withdraw from one atmosphere, we enter a new one.<sup>149</sup> But then, what is the purpose if withdrawal, and does it not make more sense to linger and contemplate? The power influencing individuals can for Foucault be described in terms of norms. In his research on normalizing, subduing structures, Foucault does not suggest a methodology to escape, or withdraw. Instead he writes that "there is no escaping from power, that it is always-already present constituting that very thing which one attempts to counter it with."<sup>150</sup> While we may not always know what normalizing powers are imposed on us, through internalizing our feelings or choices we may come closer to understanding some of them.

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<sup>145</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 156.

<sup>146</sup> Grosz, 1995.

<sup>147</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 154.

<sup>148</sup> Rogoff, 2000, p. 14.

<sup>149</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 161.

<sup>150</sup> Foucault, 1990, p. 82.

Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos continues to argue that atmospherics are in need of a strategy which emphasizes the economical, political and legal, whereas the phenomenological is embedded with aesthetics.<sup>151</sup> This presumes aesthetics as something superficial, but rather, Yuriko argues how aesthetic influence has been acknowledged and utilized throughout history.<sup>152</sup> She writes that everyday aesthetic choices are neither uncomplicated or insignificant. Rather the aesthetic based decision making, rooted in tastes and attitudes, are performed on an everyday basis and goes beyond consequences of surface value. It affects the state of larger society. Our aesthetic desires often trumps political affiliation even, Yuriko giving the example being environmentally conscious yet buying furniture from rainforest jacaranda for its visual appeal.<sup>153</sup> Similarly in Nørrebro inhabitants on a general level align with certain ideological ideas, such as anti-establishment, anti-commercial values, yet by taking part they strengthen these institutionalized ideas as well as capitalist structures. Judgement of surface as these take part in political, social and commercial interest through how they are apperceived. Aesthetic affect, as such, determinate perception on a level not touched by governmental programs or commercial enterprises.<sup>154</sup>

This thesis has suggested new ways of approaching such issues, it has suggested that through a patchwork of signifiers one can create a branding image of identity, and in turn I have through observations made an attempt to patch together an image of the area through impressions extended over a longer period of time, making selections on what may be of importance in perception of atmospheric space. Meanings circulate space visually, as well as orally and textually. As such, Rogoff argues the study of visual culture opens up a great intertextual field of knowledge where subjective study of images, sounds or spatial delineations may lead to achievement of twofold effect. Providing answers relating both to structures of interpretation, as well as extending epistemic frameworks which attempt to organize them.<sup>155</sup> Thereby, vision functions as social critique. While subject to social conditioning, vision will to some extent be individual as well, serving as a demonstration of judgement and personal disposition.

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<sup>151</sup> Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 155.

<sup>152</sup> Yuriko, 2007, p. 103.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid*, p. 56

<sup>154</sup> *ibid*, p. 57

<sup>155</sup> Rogoff (2000) p, 28-29.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis focuses on the aesthetic apprehension and experience of city structures. While the material is retrieved from a smaller local district it is my belief that similar compositions of sociocultural dynamics may be found in any given social environment. At the end of this research I have lived in Copenhagen for four months, during my time I have grown accustomed to the environment and it has allowed my study to reflect upon both instant atmospheric affect but also a growing contemplation as I stay in, or revisit each of the spaces. This thesis has been shaped throughout these continuous interactions with space, internalizing the atmosphere and analyzing the emotions or thoughts this has produced. My observations follow an auto-ethnographic research method to better understand the emotional aspect of affect in atmospheric space, as well as utilizing a process phenomenology as I pinpoint what may be perceived as an essence of sociocultural constellations. The observations are put in contrast to a theoretical framework in order to recognize systemic structures, with an emphasis on the gaze but also considering biopower, gender and race. The corporeal relationship with the city is understood as mutually defining, yet subject to influence by such institutional or authoritative powers. The method has served as a way to direct and pinpoint relations between subject, space and place by applying subjectivity and representation in a discussion with scholarly discourse.

The thesis began by analyzing my own corporeal alignment with space, and taken these in contrast with communicated ideas or preconceived notions of what Nørrebro may be. I have argued that Nørrebro's spatial identity is guided by mythologies narrated by professionals, inspired by history and cultural perceptions. As an area in the process of redevelopment I have identified urban park Superkilen as a tool to implement or redirect mythologies, ideologies, and urban attitudes towards Nørrebro as something hyperreal. The emphasis have been community, urban, multi-cultural and coolness. However, this may be seen as a strategy to align individual interests with the will of those in power. It is in the nature of mythologies to be flexible to the narrators interests, accordingly urban park Superkilen serves to specify and emphasize *desired* qualities in the local culture.

The traces of Nørrebro mythologies can also be said to guide the direction of the commerce in the streets of the district. In this thesis I study three popular commercial streets in Nørrebro, with the moniker "coolest streets in Nørrebro". I notice that while each have distinct differences, as I look

closer I see how these differences are mostly superficial. In reality they are guided by targeting a market audience, branding themselves for a specific, economically viable, customer. It is difficult to say if these are intentional or if businesses select the street or mold their brand strategies to fit within the atmospheric narrative. In the commercial streets it becomes more tangible that economic mobility dominate space as there is a pressure to purchase; a coffee, a beer, a shirt, in order to stay in space. Rather than creating community as tolerant and inviting for outsiders, perhaps this development is only creating a space where the affluent middle-class can make their own self-image within a working-class, multi-cultural narrative.

While exciting and interesting narratives of where it is cool to be may serve as an incentive to visit, the places one enjoy is also subject to individual taste. As we arrive in a place, we carry our expectations, and these preconceived notions are normally what we first look for. Each individual that walks the streets of the city make an imprint and mold its shape and sociocultural environment. Yet, the footsteps of the economically viable carry greater weight, monopolizing the spaces they visit and make them more restrictive to those can't match the economic investment. While an ontological perspective of atmosphere may give a general outlook on such dynamics, in order to fully apprehend spatial practices and small but decisive changes of sociocultural contexts one needs to be immersed. To look up close, rather than observe general dynamics from afar. This thesis thus functions as meta-critique of positivist assumptions that scribe to notions of objective truth by instead stressing difference.

We rarely end up in a space we know nothing about. As a consequence we enter the environment with preconceptions and culturally mediated assumptions of place. Some notions of what Nørrebro supposedly is was known to me before I arrived, presented as a cool place with bars, art and buzzing social life. But notions or mental images reflect sense of space as something static, when in reality places are continuously processing and developing, not just one thing but full of internal conflicting identities. As urban environments bring diverse histories together in the same geographical space in a network of bodies, objects and images it is perhaps easy to simplify and generalize these impressions. Mythologies functions in a similar sense, simplifying a complex reality and directing judgement. During my autoethnographic observations I have the intention of sensing, internalizing and analyzing perception of atmosphere, and consequently defining a sense of space. I understand images in the environment through a semiotic reading of signs, putting them in

contrast with narrated mythologies and preconceived notions of Nørrebro. It is clear that the mythologies of Nørrebro, based on its history and contemporary mediated narratives, functions as influence on commodity aesthetics and branding of local businesses. I have argued that Superkilen, while not being an inherently commercial place, it still sets a direction in the redevelopment and economic growth in the district. I have pointed to tendencies to elevate key messages, in catchy or provocative phrasing, high up on walls of buildings reaching across the district and directing the onlooker towards what is almost a sense of pride. Even for me who have not lived here for long. "We love Nørrebro" and "Your money in my ass" may be opposites in delivery, but the message equally functions the same. It defines a character, and it is impossible not to notice it.

Branding of businesses in Nørrebro follow the same characteristics. Here, government and businesses are not necessarily working together, but consciously or subconsciously understanding that relating to oneself to these mythologies will make them not just fit but also strengthen the validity of these conceptions. Some redevelopment may have an intention of desired affect, as Superkilen almost clearly does, and by starting the getting the ball rolling it escalates. Businesses and private individuals follow with their investments and redevelopment spurs. A common thread is remaking the exterior as interior, playing with the notions of politics inside/outside, urban/nature, home/city. Perhaps, just as with department stores people/customers/inhabitants stay longer if the environment takes shape like a home. A home is perhaps the definition of comfortable.

The redevelopment in Nørrebro has functioned as extending the reach of the institution, using strategies to incorporate spaces that functioned outside governmental control, with gang violence, political demonstrations and high unemployment. An effect I discerned of this, ironic though it may be for a district with strong multicultural reputation, is a homogenization of culture. Where signifiers of the multicultural community is perhaps just a superficial notion. While there is an attempt to relay Nørrebro as tolerant and embracing, the planning of Nørrebro and perhaps specifically Superkilen relies on heteronormative ideas of masculinity in the aesthetics and structure. As I combine material from my observations I am unable to escape the feeling that the cool, urban, contemporary, global city still align with ideals of white-masculine-homogeneity.

When creating new meaning of these mythologies, perhaps the especially blurry key terms are easily remolded. Some of the important ones for Nørrebro are *cool*, *community*, *urban* as more or

less ubiquitous and interchangeable. It is perhaps ironic that I, along with many others, would come to Nørrebro to take part of this outsider community when in actuality we are very much insiders, enforcing institutionalized ideas as we arrive, spend our money and procrastinate here. Placement is seemingly an important consideration for which places to develop, or what streets become popular, or *cool*. Each of the streets I studied and which has been attributed as cool are shorter streets with compact activity, opening up to a more airy space. The stamp of cool is a promise of sorts, pointing to the quality of the experience. Nørrebro is not supposed to be the typical tourist site, you come here to take part of a local, community atmosphere. Something which is perhaps out of the ordinary in terms of tourist experiences, and what the tourist on the quest of finding what is authentic may be looking for. Relating to perception of identity, how do the activities I partake in define my own identity. It remains unclear how important visual signifiers connoting visibility or belonging are in the grand scheme of things. As we socialize with friends in spaces we may not be critical of the environment in the same way I have been in this process, perhaps even less so if you have not travelled much and grew up in the same area and have little to compare to. As my purpose have been to judge and criticize, I have noticed more of the sociocultural structures than the average inhabitant probably would.

I suggested that as I entered Nørrebro that first day, I arrived as a resident rather than a tourist and therefore I desired to align my own identity with that of the district. Doing so would perhaps be a comforting feeling of belonging. Although, while I do believe these feelings carry weight *to belong* is a far more complex concept. I stated that I feel as if I do belong here, or that I could. That where I have travelled before my presence had not been questioned. This is perhaps at the core when considering how corporeal apprehension of atmosphere are conditioned by individual alignment within sociocultural, hegemonic structures of power. Atmospheres have been described as a filtered reality, sensorially totalizing, desiring to belong. Belonging relates to what we understand and relate to, our community. Atmospheric sense of comfort is grounded in this recognition. While subject to normalizing institutional powers, perhaps identifying with community is also a choice individuals make through a desire to take part, and create our own sense of self. But it would also require being accepted by the community.

The desiring affect turns something ordinary extraordinary. As the study of the commercial enterprises has perhaps shows, it does necessarily take much effort to elevate the everyday. It can be

done through small measures as well, like visiting the park with with friends and some drinks just as well as visiting the Eiffel Tower. But it also follows a desire to be on trend, relating to things that are cool. Within capitalist structures, this elevation is something you buy, although not everybody is able. As such, perhaps the reincarnation of the flaneur may be seen as the contemporary creative professional, defined by his cultural curiosities and abundance of time.

Although I would perhaps in all aspects apart from my gender be considered the norm, I do not feel like I necessarily would belong everywhere. An idea of belonging as cultural inscription has been suggested. Perhaps rather than necessarily meaning how we are brought up is solely where we belong, this may be where subjective preferences enters the equation. This must be rooted in our own singular or communal experiences as well as choices and personal preferences. The engineered atmospheric affect should suggest whiteness, may belong anywhere. Instead, my I believe that perhaps my "normality" gives me the mobility to belong where I choose. As my appearance would more likely not leave me out of the community.

This belonging is however an illusion, or if viewed in a positive light a choice. An atmosphere is always unique, impossible to capture and identify. You can attempt to reproduce but no one will ever be completely the same. So many parameters determine its appearance. Our lives are leaving images in our wake, telling our stories, leaving fragmented memories of history, of values, norms and ideologies. They are left behind for us to view, to study, analyze and discuss. Something that is always in movement, always changing and adapting can impossibly relate answers in black and white or discern an absolute truth. Since my observations have been an ongoing process spanning over several months structures I have studied has also changed mid process. Some businesses closing down, others opening. Also serving as proof that the structures we build are ever changing and creating new bonds of interrelations.

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## **IMAGES**

Image 1: Photos from Nørrebro, photographer: Mikaela Sjöberg.

Image 2: Author's map of Nørrebro, created by Mikaela Sjöberg.

Image 3: Photos from Superkilen\_1, photographer: Mikaela Sjöberg.

Image 4: Photos from Superkilen\_2, photographer: Mikaela Sjöberg.

Image 5: Photos from Jægersborggade, photographer: Mikaela Sjöberg.

Image 6: Photos from Elmegade, photographer: Mikaela Sjöberg.

Image 7: Photos from Blågårdsgade, photographer: Mikaela Sjöberg.