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Urban Development and the Refrain

A new materialist perspective on current urban development practice

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Storytelling and urban development

Research about storytelling within urban development is often framed as the crafting of grand narratives or a tool used to promote urban ideologies (Gunder & Hillier, 2016; Lindner & Meissner, 2018 among others). This human-centred understanding of storytelling seems increasingly contested with the threat of climate change. Non-human agencies, such as water, landscapes, geological resources, temperature, and air, to name a few, are becoming harder and harder to ignore. With this paper, we analyze the urban development project called Jernbanebyen and its initial attempts at establishing itself as an attractive destination in the city. Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *refrain* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 311), we interpret storytelling as an affective material assemblage. We aim to understand the process of urban imaginaries as an interrelated web of small stories and actants in the city, including memories, materials, and landscapes, rather than a grand narrative.

Theoretical context

Urban imaginaries are always political and are an attempt to frame a coherent narrative of how we can live in an urban environment as well as what issues the urban needs to address (Lindner & Meissner, 2018). In this paper, we do not wish to investigate the ideology behind these imaginaries but rather pay attention to the small stories (Boje, 2008, 2011; Tsing, 2015; Haraway, 2016) that shape the process of developing Jernbanebyen. We aim to investigate the agency of storytelling within the new materialist turn. Inspired by 'onto-Stories' (Bennett, 2009), fabulation (Haraway, 2016; Wiame, 2018), studies of our co-species (Despret, 2021), and the concept of *story making* (Jørgensen, n.d., in press), to name a few; this is an investigation of how small stories create new trajectories.

The Case - Jernbanebyen's Track 10

Jernbanebyen is an ongoing development project in Copenhagen hoping to transform a partly abandoned industrial area into a vibrant neighbourhood. In 2024 the development plan will pass, and construction can begin. Nevertheless, until then, the investors and developers wish to create a 'good reputation' through 'intermediate activities'. In this case through the transformation of an abandoned industrial building into a cultural centre. The case is chosen as a platform for investigating different agencies that contribute to creating the investors 'good reputation'. The analysis is based on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the refrain as well as Despret's study of territorializing birds. With this analysis we wish to show the variety of modes of existence (Latour, 2013) instead of reducing complexity and finding a master discourse or explanatory theory (Despret, 2021) of Track 10's territorialization process of Jernbanebyen.

Analysis

We analyze the case of Track 10 through the Deleuze and Guattarian concept of the refrain. The refrain is an ongoing process of territorialization and deterritorialization. Track 10 is a new beginning inscribed with consistency, achieved within a chaotic field - abandoned, industrial buildings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 323). Territorialization is an expression that marks a new beginning (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 325) rather than an occupation of land and dominance (Despret, 2021, p. 17). The territorialization process involves the existing landscape and buildings, counterpoints and other territories that mark this new centre's boundary. Resulting in a complex web which Deleuze and Guattari refer to as an intra-assemblage (Adkins, 2015, p. 179; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 323).

Despret detaches the human meaning of occupation from the birds' notion of territory by understanding their territorial behavior as a living and dynamic process (Despret, 2021). Through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of territories, she turned her attention to the small stories of birds and their relationships with each other, with the landscape and other species. Inspired by this fine tuned attention and curiosity of an ornithologist following the "life stories" of birds (Despret, 2021, p. 17), we wish to examine the process of creating a new territory in Jernbanebyen. By doing so, we aim to understand the process of urban imaginaries as an interrelated web of small stories of actants, including memories, materials, and landscapes.

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