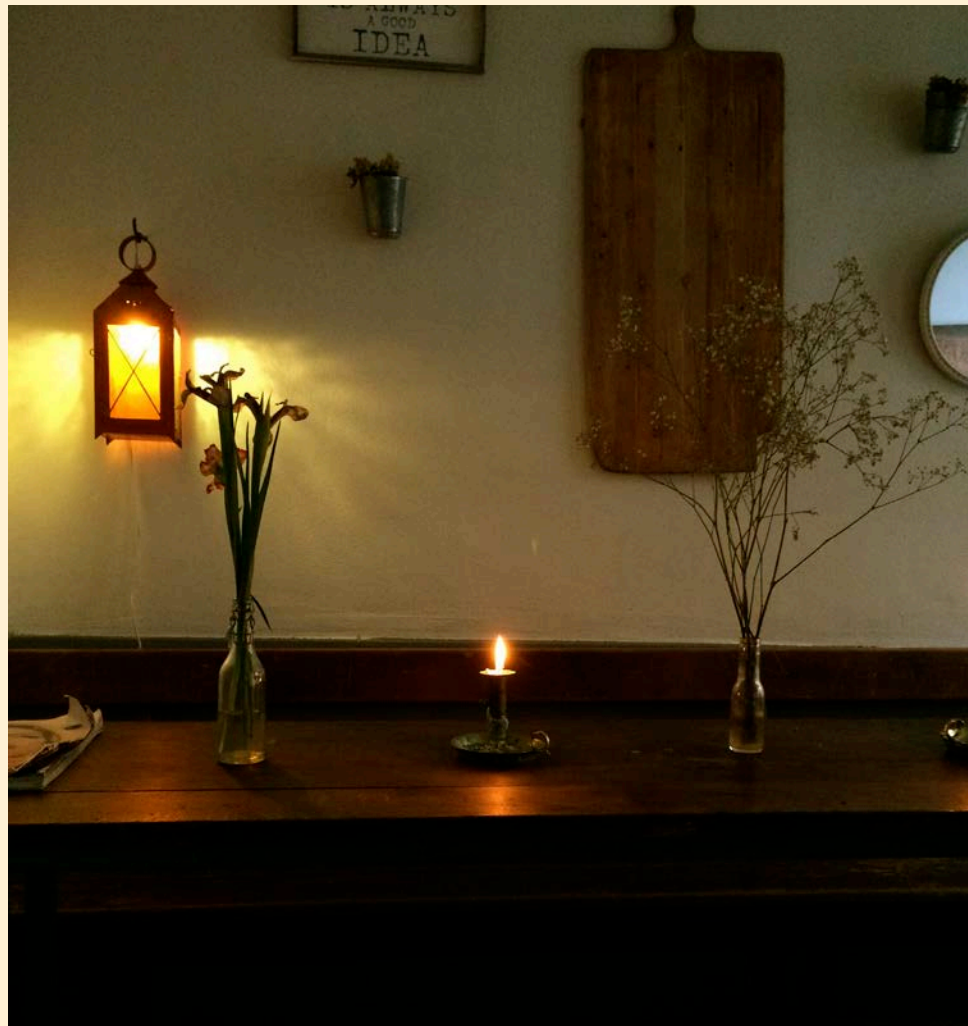


# HYGGE

*Dwelling Poetically*

James Wilson  
M.Arch 2011



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## Foreword

This document outlines the details of the travel completed by the 2014 Booth Fellow and the conclusions, new questions, and new ideas produced in the course of said travel. The Report is supplemented by an Appendix of related content for the interested reader to engage with for a broader discussion of the research topic.

The initial intent of this research project, as stated in the original proposal, is to develop an understanding of the socio-phenomenological aspects of the Danish concept of *hygge* and the effect it has on both Denmark's cultural sense of cooperative stewardship and the social and emotional wellness of the Danish population. The goal of this research is to offer the architectural discipline a uniquely focused perspective on: the link between environment and mind, emotion and sociality; the potential role of the built environment in promoting social and emotional wellness and intelligence; the potential force of architecture in shaping a culture of stewardship and conservation.

This project is less about solidifying concrete conclusions or answers, more about asking other, different questions about what else architecture might be, about what else architecture might do. This work has been most beneficial to me personally in that it has led me to ask questions and craft speculations about architecture and the act of dwelling in ways that were not immediately accessible to me previously. This work has allowed me to ask different, and, I believe, more effective questions about the relationship between the built environment and possible future cultures of stewardship and wellness. It has illuminated new lines of inquiry. It has informed my sense of curiosity and altered my intentions. It has shaped the way I investigate relationships between person and environment. It has caused me to realize new ways to connect the dots and offered new ways to explore space and place.

Ultimately, this work has illuminated a single fundamental inquiry to focus and guide my continuing work in sustainable design research:

*What does it mean to dwell? What does it mean to be "at home" in the world? What does it mean to inhabit a place in a meaningful and vital way?*

# Report

## Summary of Travel

For the initial stage of this extended research project, I travelled to Denmark for four weeks, spending time in the following cities: Copenhagen, Aarhus, Esbjerg, and Aalborg. During these four weeks of travel my primary objective was to interact directly with native Danes in order to gather qualitative descriptions of *hygge* as a lived cultural experience. Ultimately, via both semi-formal interviews and informal conversations, I was able to collect personal narrative regarding *hygge* from 20 different individuals of varying demographics.

A portion of the more formal interviews took place in the setting of the informants' homes while a few took place in public cafes. The more informal, impromptu conversations occurred in many different public settings: a bookstore, an antiques store, a restaurant, a car rental office. In each encounter, whether planned meeting or casual public encounter, I began by asking directly about *hygge* (in as much of a non-leading way as possible) and, making use of open-ended follow-up questions (based on semantic ethnography methods), attempted to elicit a personal account or explanation of what *hygge* meant to each individual.

I did not record audio or take notes during any of these encounters as I felt that to do so would have been obtrusive and distinctly contrary to my efforts to foster a *hyggelig* atmosphere between myself and each individual or group of informants. My goal with each of these encounters was to behave in as much of a *hyggelig* way as possible - to contribute to a sense of shared ease, safety, encouragement, trust, etc. In short, I attempted, during each interaction, to participate in what I understood to be the standard social protocol of *hygge*. (\*In all cases I introduced myself as the recipient of a travel fellowship that entailed the investigation of *hygge*.)

I recorded all collected data as field notes immediately at the conclusion of each encounter. This method of recording quickly presented itself as the most natural and direct way to engage with informants. I also found this method of recording information to be the most effective in terms of exploring and organizing the various related themes that began to identify themselves over the course of multiple encounters. (\*Excerpts from these field notes are included throughout this document, denoted by this symbol \* and this *font*.)

Upon the recognition that *hygge* is associated with certain types of public spaces - namely and especially cafes or coffee shops, I also spent a significant amount of observation time in such spaces while in Denmark - experiencing the *hyggelig* atmosphere and closely studying the ways others used these spaces, the ways others interacted in these spaces. I recorded in my field notes the general behavior and activities of the individuals I witnessed in these spaces.





As a supplement to this fieldwork - or rather, as a result of the themes and questions that the fieldwork raised, upon the conclusion of my travel, I began to critically review a variety of texts that I felt related to my broader questions regarding the social and spatial consequences of *hygge* as a cultural concept. These readings are indexed in the Appendix.

### Challenges

A few difficulties were encountered in the course of gathering this research. The original intent was for the project to be structured around ethnographic research methods including in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups. It became clear during the pre-travel planning stages that these research methods require a significant amount of time for both planning and execution - more time than my current budget and schedule would allow. Ultimately, although this research cannot be considered a formal or authoritatively extensive ethnography - the methods I used and the mind-set and spirit with which I engaged the topic should be understood as ethnographic in nature. My preliminary research into ethnography and its related principles of qualitative research undoubtedly influenced the way I executed the travel and the way in which I recorded and interpreted the data gathered. While traveling I attempted to adopt and develop an “*ethnographer’s sensitivity*” that would grant me maximal access to all layers of information.

The other notable difficulty faced in the course of gathering narrative data about the lived experiences of *hygge* is that Danes are typically rather reserved and do not readily share personal stories and thoughts with strangers or even with those who are not close friends and family. I was informed of this cultural characteristic by a Danish friend prior to my travel while planning meetings. I was told to be prepared for most Danes to seem “*closed-off*” and “*not forthcoming with their feelings.*” Once in Denmark and attempting to engage with native Danes, I did find this to be the case the majority of the time. This meant that I had to re-calibrate my expectations for the amount of data I would be able to gather in the short time I was in Denmark. This challenge relates to the first challenge noted - in both cases, a longer travel period/more time would have allowed me to properly implement ethnographic research methods while also developing trustful relationships with more individuals.

Ultimately, although I did successfully gather a wealth of data during my travel, I do believe that the project as a whole would benefit from additional time spent in the field. It is my plan to seek out other future opportunities to return to Denmark in order to conduct further research. I would also value the opportunity to return to Denmark during the other seasons of the year as it is my understanding that the manifestation and experience of *hygge* is dependent on the season. *Hygge* in winter is, I’m told, very different from *hygge* in the summer.



## Executed Itinerary

**Travel Period:** December 21, 2014 - January 20, 2015

**NYC** ->

**Copenhagen** [12/21/14 - 12/27/14] ->

**Aarhus** [12/27/14 - 1/3/15] ->

**Esbjerg** [1/3/15 - 1/8/15] ->

**Aalborg** [1/8/15 - 1/13/15] ->

**Copenhagen** [1/13/15 - 1/20/15] ->

**NYC**



## Hygge: “A Slippery Concept”

(\*B. : “I think you are very brave for attempting to investigate such a complex and confusing concept.”)

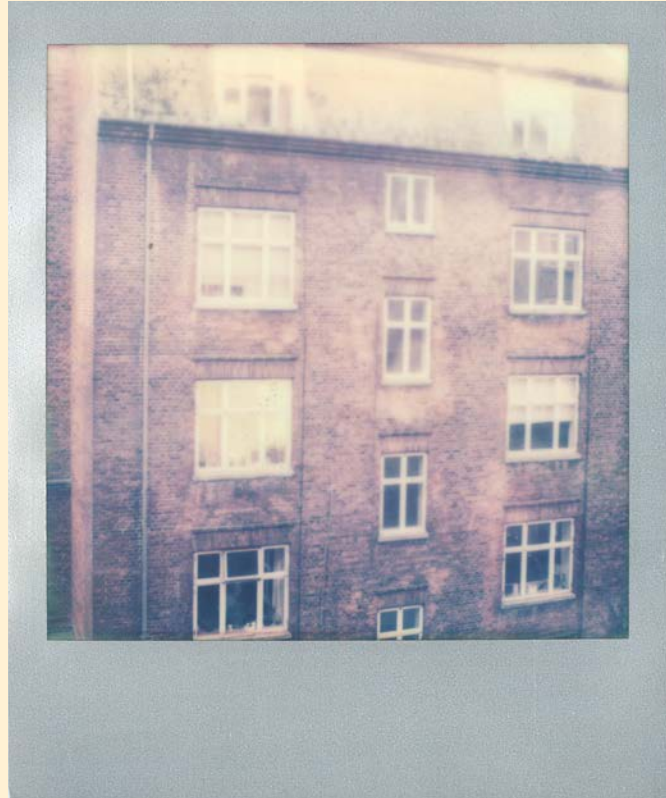
(\*B. : This has reawakened something in me - I've started thinking a lot about it all - in a new and interesting way... / seemingly it is very pleasant for the people I've talked to about hygge to think about it in such a focused, concentrated way... in struggling to translate or express what hygge is, they seem to have discovered entirely new ways of thinking about it and its place in their lives...)

*Hygge* is not easily translated into English. Using only the word “coziness,” as many do when attempting to describe the meaning of *hygge* in English, does not come near to encapsulating all that the concept involves. This project originated with a curiosity about the various complexities and nuances of *hygge*. As I learned more about the concept, I developed an idea that *hygge* as a concept might offer a useful and productive lens through which to examine and discuss social and emotional wellness in the context of architecture.

Though it may initially seem to be a fairly specific, straightforward and contained concept, *hygge* involves, upon close examination, an intricately complex and interwoven web of various related concepts. A single specific definition will vary from person to person, from situation to situation, from family to family. Now that I have had the opportunity to discuss *hygge* with a wide range of different individuals, each of whom has experienced *hygge* in the context of a different personal history, it is my understanding that *hygge* means the same thing, in general, to all Danes and yet simultaneously means very different things to each individual Dane. For some it is loose and wide-ranging, applicable to many things. For others it seems to be more strictly defined, dependent on and reserved for certain settings or activities. For this reason I have made the argument that perhaps *hygge* can only really be effectively translated through the collage of many different collected narratives. Furthermore, due to the fact that the experience of *hygge* is so closely related to and influenced by one's personal history and identity, the various interpretations of *hygge* I present here are necessarily filtered through my own personal life experiences and memories of tradition, comfort, refuge, and contentment.

There is also not one static, specific, general description of what *hygge* feels like. There are common factors: a sense of warmth, ease, coziness, security, relaxation, familiarity, etc. But each individual develops his own sense of what *hygge* is and feels like through the accumulation of life experiences and memories. The particular description that one offers for what *hygge* is speaks to that person's identity, constructed slowly over time as the person moves through the world and experiences different things - different spaces, different events, different sensations, different traditions, different stories, different emotions. When a person explains what *hygge* is in terms of her own experience, she is speaking of and through memories and imagination. (“*Hygge is a very individual thing.*”)





The sheer amount and range of ways to describe *hygge* - the difficulty of expressing it in any single, neat and tidy package, and the seemingly ever-lengthening list of related concepts has caused me to work slowly and cautiously for fear that I may inadvertently offer a reduced statement of its qualities and consequence.

*Hygge* is a mode of habitation that is culturally ingrained. It is a culturally inherited spatial, material and social sensibility. It has to do with a sense of belonging - belonging both to one's culture and belonging to one's immediate environment. Though of course every society has an equivalent or approximation of the *hyggelig* experience, it seems that Danish society is perhaps the only one to frame this particular type of socio-spatial experience as a specific, primary feature of its cultural identity. It seems that a significant part of being Danish is to have a special and intentional awareness and appreciation for the values that revolve around the concept of *hygge*. To actively seek out and habitually cultivate *hyggelig* settings, situations and events seems to be an explicit component of Danish social behavior. (\*"Danes live *hygge*." / "Hygge is something Danes live.") *Hygge* would appear to be a significant part of everyday Danish life - unlike in other cultures, where experiences of comfort, security, and familiarity are maybe less explicitly embroidered into the day-to-day lives or identities of individuals. *Hygge* seems to form the basis for Danes' cultural self-understanding. It is used by Danes to both understand themselves and as a way to describe themselves to others.

*Hygge* is the cultural tendency of the Danes to deliberately set aside a time and a space to commune, to relax, to be content, to be equal, to celebrate life's simple joys. There is an implicit protocol concerning the social aspect of shared *hygge*: those participating in a *hyggelig* gathering agree to generally focus only on agreeable things, to be humble and generous, to dispense with any sort of self-promotion or individual concerns, to place themselves on the "same level" as everyone else, to behave in an encouraging and trusting manner. These guidelines are, in a way, necessary in order for the *hyggelig* setting to always be a promise of sanctuary, easy comfort, security, and trust. In Danish culture, *hygge* seems to happen mostly through intentional actions, by way of a willingness and conscious decision to participate, to be present, to put time, controversy and disagreements aside.

If a *hygge*-like phenomenon is produced in the US, for example, it is often coincidental. The planning of any small gathering is not immediately the same as *hygge*. The gathering may turn out to be *hyggelig* by chance instead of by design. A *hyggelig* gathering requires a level of conscious effort to be present, equal, agreeable, content, slow. *Hygge* is more explicit than simply having good intentions for a gathering. It entails an explicit action or decision to honestly engage, to actively participate in a positive, equal, relaxed, trusting, un-rushed manner. Or it is the explicit action of taking the time to "*hygge* oneself" It is the regular, ritualistic activity of making oneself cozy, relaxed, calm, comfortable, secure, safe. I would venture to say that to *hygge* is an example of an explicit action of dwelling poetically or "inhabiting with intensity."





*Hygge* is performative, it involves rituals and activities of shaping and using space - actions that invest space with meaning. *Hygge* is projective, its effects can be lasting - strengthening and perpetuating positive emotions and community. *Hygge* is emergent, it cannot be forcibly manufactured, it must arise naturally from a social and material atmosphere that is conducive to its emergence. (“*Hygge* most often arises organically - you can expect *hygge* but never guarantee it.”)

The shared cultural language of *hygge* is important. In many circumstances it seems that the use of an explicit, associated language can contribute to the generation and sustaining of a *hyggelig* atmosphere. The word *hygge* is used as both a noun and a verb. The adjectival form is *hyggelig*. In general, *hyggelig* is used to describe each of these things: an intangible but perceptible external atmosphere or ambiance; a tangible, material, physical setting; an external, shared social setting; an internal emotion, mood, or state of being. *Hyggelig* can also be used to describe, among many things: a particular place, an experience, an individual or a group of people, an activity, an object, a book, a piece of music, a meal, a trip. Any phenomenon that causes one to experience a *hyggelig* emotion would be described as *hyggelig*.

*Hygge* can emerge in many different ways. Predominantly, *hygge* seems to entail a shared space - a small gathering of close, familiar individuals engaged in a social activity, but one can also “have *hygge*” by oneself. *Hygge* can refer to both a co-produced space of community and to a space that is private and self-made. *Hygge* is a quality of space and emotion that is often shared but is always at least individual, that is often objectively, but always at least subjectively, constructed or perceived.

*Hygge* often involves an embodied, sensory experience: the sight of a flickering candle or the dancing flames of a fire, the experience of warmth, the taste of a favorite or luxuriant food or drink, the familiar scent of one’s childhood home, the soft touch of a woven sweater or blanket. However, the sensory perception of these things alone does not necessarily generate a *hyggelig* emotion. Often, a *hyggelig* experience may have more to do with the spirit of an encounter or event - the perception of more abstract phenomena like safety, security, trust, cohesion, encouragement, ease. In most cases, *hygge* emerges from the combination of a certain material spatial setting with a certain immaterial shared social spirit. Though often a space may be physically arranged in such a way as to “set the stage” for *hygge*, the spatial and material aspects of a setting alone will not guarantee that *hygge* is produced. Further, *hygge* may emerge even in the absence of any *hyggelig* materials or spatial organization. The behavior and mood of the participants in a social interaction or the occupants in a shared spatial event are, however, essential to the production of a *hyggelig* atmosphere. *Hygge* will not exist in a situation that is absent of behaviors and emotions conducive to and congruent with *hygge*. *Hygge* is not dependent on a particular spatial setting, but it may be influenced or triggered by a spatial setting that is compatible with and encourages *hyggelig* behavior.



I believe *hygge* is a useful concept for architects to examine and contemplate as an effective model for an approach to integrated, healthful, human-focused design because it weaves together the sensory, tangible, material characteristics of a spatial setting, with the palpable but intangible atmospheric qualities of the space, with the social and emotional aspects of the space. In this way *hygge* seems to me a useful expression of the interrelationship between these various dynamic elements that shape our experience of an environment and thus affect our wellbeing and behavior.

### **A Culture of Wellness + Contentment**

*“My house is my refuge, an emotional piece of architecture, not a cold piece of convenience”* -Luis Barragan

*“The origin of the word hygge is Norwegian and old Nordic. It means seeking refuge, protection, and shelter from the raging of the outside elements.”* -Bente D. Knudsen

As noted in the research proposal, Denmark is considered one of the world’s “happiest” countries and is widely recognized as a progressively sustainable culture. My investigation of *hygge* originated from the assumption that these two aspects are necessarily related - and that they reinforce each other. The initial research question was: ***What about the sociocultural space of Denmark fosters wellness and sustainable behavior?***

The ultimate goal of this ongoing research project is to develop a useful translation and exposition of *hygge* for use by architects concerned with the design of wellness-promoting spaces and places. This document seeks to provide the architectural discipline with a set of ideas and questions in support of an architectural practice that emphasizes and is capable of the creation of atmospheres that foster social and emotional wellness and intelligence. ***How can architecture encourage salutary forms of dwelling, characterized by well-being, stewardship and presence?***

This project has been informed and propelled by an interest in the ideas represented by the recently launched WELL Building Standard. The emergence of this initiative has marked a major and important shift in the building industry toward a focus on the relationship between the built environment and human health and wellness. My critique of the WELL Building Standard is that it presents an incomplete picture of wellness by neglecting to include meaningful emphasis on social and emotional factors of wellness. It is my hope that the ideas gathered in this document regarding the values and qualities associated with *hygge* - such as the social and emotional importance of cohesion, cooperation, trust, refuge, agency, encouragement, restorative intimacy and nostalgia - and the way these things are manifest in Danish culture, may prove to be useful resources for the continued improvement of the WELL Building Standard.



*Hygge*, as both a particular atmosphere that is conducive to and encouraging of positive emotions and behaviors, and as a set of actions and rituals that shape space and give it meaning, suggests strategies for an architecture of qualitative wellness. *Hygge* involves an emphasis on a sheltering and encouraging intimacy, trust and honesty, connection and empathy - all of which are essential to the health and wellness of a community. The argument here is that in order for an individual to be healthy and well, she must have the support of a larger community that is itself healthy and well. The question becomes: how can architecture work to support such communities? The answer, I think, is that architecture must provide spaces and places that not only allow for, but encourage and support (for lack of a better single, encompassing word) *hyggelig* atmospheres and behaviors.

Though it is true that architects cannot create *hygge* for others simply by designing a space that is conducive to it, they can, however, have dramatic influence on the way the spaces they design are used by designing for potentialities. This means more than simply designing a space to be flexible or easily adaptable. It means designing a space with a renewed, intensive attention to human life as it is and, perhaps more importantly, how it *could*, be lived. This suggests that perhaps more value be placed on such strategies as ethnographic approaches to design, narrative-based design, participatory design and other related methods. The more an architect understands about how people socially produce space, appropriate space, use space, and make meaning with space, the more capable she will be of designing spaces that inspire and stimulate positive social and emotional phenomena like *hygge*.

Wellness is always going to be a social goal, a cooperatively achieved state. This means that language - and the ways in which we communicate with each other - is essential. We can think of *hygge* as a particular form of communication that embodies such values as openness, trust, equality, cooperation, humility, and encouragement. *Hygge* might be described as involving a form of communication that is less declarative or assertive and more subjective and tentative. *Hygge* implies a co-produced, cooperative space - a space for co-presence and collective endeavor - and so we might consider the different social elements of *hygge* as a way to gain insight into how we might design spaces for new, effective forms of collaborative communication.

I would like to note here that I have encountered some writers who have written about *hygge* in such a way as to condemn it for being a strict, normative and repressive cultural phenomenon. This is, in my opinion, a misreading of the concept. I would argue that perhaps the best - or at least the most interesting and potentially useful - translation of *hygge* I have gathered is that of *hygge* as an atmosphere of encouraging shelter, safety, and security. Essential to the production of *hygge* is that all participants should feel safe enough and at ease enough to be completely and authentically themselves - honest, vulnerable and unguarded. This to me indicates that *hygge* cannot be about repression in any sense. If one feels repressed or somehow controlled in a social setting, that setting is, by definition, not *hyggelig*. It would indicate, rather, that not all participants in the social setting have succeeded in adopting a spirit of generosity, empathy, equality and humility.



To the question of whether *hygge* emphasizes or promotes sameness I would submit the clarification that sameness is not the same thing as equality. There may be a thin line between the two concepts, but I would argue that *hygge* is not about sameness. I think it would be a mistake to interpret it this way because *hygge* is also very clearly about identity, both cultural and individual. Alongside the focus on equality and collectivity, I interpret *hygge* as also involving both the celebration of one's individual identity and a valuing of unique, characteristic personalities, experiences, objects and spaces.

This does not reconcile with the idea that *hygge* is about the simple suppression or devaluing of individual identities and differences. The nuances and complexities of *hygge* seem to allow for both a sense of shared equality and celebration of collective identity and a recognition and appreciation of individual identity. Socializing in a *hyggelig* setting is not about ignoring individual differences. It is about recognizing and respecting these differences in a manner that is open, earnest, graceful, encouraging, fair, humble, and generous. *Hygge* is about not emphasizing or focusing on differences to the point where social equilibrium is impossible. One who is participating in *hygge* does not parade or highlight how he is different, or better, than his social counterparts, but neither does he deny or dishonestly ignore the fact that each individual has a unique value and identity. *Hygge*, then, is about acknowledging that we are all very different, yet we all have equal value.

*Hygge* is also about how we come to understand and then express our individual identities through the crafting of our homes and personal environments. Our comfort and wellness depend on our freedom and ability to compose and produce the spaces and atmospheres we desire. *Hygge* is very commonly experienced as a collectively achieved atmosphere and can be seen as a demonstration of how cultural wellness too requires that each individual is a participating co-producer of shared social space. This may support a radical argument for architecture to be delivered incomplete or unfinished - to be completed and appropriated by the occupants, exercising their spatial agency, according to their own values and concerns. Could architects relinquish a portion of their agency in order to bolster the agency of the occupant?

A certain sense of rootedness and constancy is also associated with the experience of *hygge* - with, for example, its focus on tradition, inherited family rituals, restorative nostalgia and cherished keepsakes and other tokens of memory. This suggests that *hygge* might serve to remind architects of one of architecture's most essential tasks - that of defending against the terror of time - while at the same time providing a sensibility for how a space might be designed to offer its inhabitants a salutary sense of fixity. *Hygge* is also very much about slowness and a striving for presence and in this way might offer strategies for the shaping of environments and atmospheres that could provide relief and shelter from the alienating effects of hypermodernity's speed and anonymity. In addition, related to this existential form of wellness we could consider *hygge* as a collective commitment to foster, in ourselves and each other, a sense of belonging - perhaps the very foundation of what it means to be well.



*Hygge* can also be thought of as a form of self-care. When one makes the necessary effort to insert herself into a safe, sheltering, intimate, calm and restorative social setting, - a *hyggelig* setting - she is exercising a form of self-care by exposing herself to positive emotions and feelings of community, connection, trust and encouragement. Additionally, when one takes action to shape one's surroundings in such a way as to make himself feel relaxed, safe, "at home," at ease, like his authentic self - he is exercising a form of self-care by immersing himself in an atmosphere that fosters a sense of belonging, rootedness, self-knowledge and meaningfulness.

This intensive study has also caused me to consider how the space or atmosphere and the act of architectural production itself might change in such a way as to promote wellness. For example, what would a *hyggelig* design process look like? For starters, I would suggest that it would be a much slower, deliberate process. It would be a more authentically collaborative and cooperative process. Perhaps a completely different language would be used when interrogating a design problem and discussing the possible solutions. This language would be more humane, more optimistically speculative, more rooted in an awareness of what it means to dwell, to inhabit, to belong. Perhaps the design of every project, every program, every type of space would be approached as a species or form of "dwelling."

To put it succinctly, *hygge* is perhaps about nothing more and nothing less than making both ourselves and each other feel "at home" - safe, at ease, content. *Hygge* is about making ourselves and each other feel *well*.

I would assert that *hygge* encapsulates many of the core values - safety, equality, contentment, cohesion - that I would argue are prerequisites for a culture of wellness and that social and cultural wellness is a prerequisite for a culture of sustainability.





## A Sustainable Culture

*“..[W]e require places where the values outside of us encourage and enforce the aspirations within us.” -Alain de Botton*

*“We depend on our surroundings obliquely to embody the moods and ideas we respect and then to remind us of them. We look to our buildings to hold us, like a kind of psychological mould, to a helpful vision of ourselves. We arrange around us material forms which communicate to us what we need - but are at constant risk of forgetting we need - within. We turn to wallpaper, benches, paintings and streets to staunch the disappearance of our true selves.” -Alain de Botton*

*“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.” -Baba Dioum*

If we define a sustainable culture as a culture of stewardship, conservation, preservation, mutual care and responsibility, health and wellness, presence and awareness, we find that *hygge* and Danish social culture are in many ways a very handy model for what a sustainable culture might look like.

*Hygge* in Danish culture seems to be a connective thread, a shared concern that weaves together and strengthens a collective sense of responsibility to each other, a collective commitment to contentment, positivity, cohesion and empathy. In this way *hygge* is a model for an effective cultural phenomenon that promotes the crucial participation of its members in a larger cooperative effort to lead more sustainable lives.

**I have here explicated the various ways in which I believe the various values and themes of *hygge* relate to the project of cultural sustainability:**

- >>> *Hygge* is about the exercise of spatial agency. It is the recognition and expression of our own individual and collective power to act on our environmental surroundings - to shape the spaces and places that we want and need to be well. It is about our ability to make meaning with space. These means of action form the basis of a culture of stewardship - a society that understands its role in the caretaking and maintenance of its places.
- >>> *Hygge* is about presence and awareness, those states of being that lead to more effective practices of conservation, preservation, and stewardship. *Hygge* is about the work of empathizing. *Hygge* fosters the ability of the individual to understand and identify with all the animate and inanimate beings that make up his environment. The work of generating and maintaining *hygge* teaches the individual how to be a custodian of a space or an atmosphere. *Hygge* cultivates both a social and a spatial consciousness in its participants.
- >>> *Hygge* emphasizes the types of egalitarian values that a culture must be built on in order to be truly sustainable.





>>> *Hygge* is characterized by a sincere contentment with what one has and with one's position in life, a behavioral tendency that supports a culture that consumes less, consumes more responsibly, and consumes with meaning. Related to this concept of contentment is the *hyggelig* notion of cherishing and caring for what one has and has inherited, a concept that is characteristic of a culture of preservation and stewardship.

A certain sense of contentment, both individual and shared, as that which is associated with *hygge*, must be central to a culture of sustainability and wellness. In fact, perhaps the importance of cultural contentment to the larger mission of sustainability cannot be overstated. It does not matter how sustainable the technology of our buildings and infrastructure if the human element is neglected. A society of individuals who are disengaged, disconnected, apathetic, or alienated cannot support a culture of sustainability and wellness.

>>> *Hygge* reinforces cooperation, cohesion, and trust - all of which feed a culture of collaboration, and organized efforts for social and environmental change. The value of a strengthened sense of community could also positively impact a neighborhood's resiliency in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

>>> *Hygge* is about memory, tradition and a valuing of both personal and collective past and supports a culture of historical awareness and preservation.

>>> *Hygge* involves collective participation. It is about the cooperative shaping of a space and the participatory making of place. A sustainable culture demands the participation of all individuals to work together toward a larger, shared goal.

>>> *Hygge* involves rituals of making oneself and others feel "at home." These types of actions are representative of the idea of sustainable behavior. We might think of sustainable behavior as a set of spatially situated, or environmental rituals that involve personal narrative, identity, memory, and social customs. Or perhaps we could make the argument that sustainable behavior is defined by a mode of dwelling that makes the larger, extended world into a shared, social dwelling. The individual who is able to make himself and those around him feel "at home" in the world, whatever the immediate surroundings, could be thought of as a model citizen or agent of sustainable culture.



If as architects we wish to participate in the production of a sustainable culture, perhaps we should take on, in some ways, the role of teachers, or advocates. Perhaps it should become part of the architect's role, as perpetual students of the relationship between body and environment, to teach others how to effectively engage with space in such a way as to produce the atmospheres one might desire or need for wellness and meaning.

This project has convinced me that maybe we ought to more explicitly conceive of architecture as, first and foremost, the production and shaping of human mood and emotion. Form, material, detail, ornament - these are the various means and modes of architectural practice - but the real work and effort of architectural practice - the guiding purpose - must have more to do with the directing, structuring, nurturing and encouraging of the human spirit.

*Hygge* is just one example of a cultural concept that architects, as cultural agents, should seek to understand. Though knowledge and experience of *hygge* does not necessarily translate directly to specific design strategies, it does translate to a more abstract but no less meaningful and consequential consciousness that will unquestionably and permanently impact one's intuition, design approach, philosophy, thought practices and sensibility.

At its core, this project is about critically re-examining and questioning anew what it means to dwell. It is an examination of how architecture might teach us ways of dwelling that are better for us and for our environment. It is about asking the question, again and again: ***What else can architecture do?***

Again, I feel it is valuable to state that this project is ultimately about reminding ourselves that the most basic and essential purpose of architecture is to make ourselves feel at home in the world - to make ourselves feel that we belong. It seems to me that architecture has not lately been providing this most basic service and that this is the seed of the issue - this is why the practice of architecture and the building industry have become so destructively unsustainable. Architecture, the environments in which we live our lives, must encourage us to feel at home, to belong. When we feel at home, when we feel that we belong, our behavior changes, a whole different perspective, a whole different way of being and acting in the world is opened to us. **This is where sustainable design must begin.**

## Future Research

**Exhibition** : *an atmosphere in the form of an exhibition [a potentiality for hygge]*

**Book** : *an atmosphere in the form of a collage / a collage in the form of a book*

As I have found this research to be incredibly fruitful, compelling and consequential, it is my intention to continue work on this project beyond the scope of the Booth Fellowship. My immediate plans for continuing this investigation are centered on the upcoming exhibition to be installed at Taubman College in fall 2016.

My current plan is for the exhibition to be a collectively produced space that, while it is installed, will serve as a shared refuge for the students, staff and faculty of the Art and Architecture Building. I plan to invite the students, staff and faculty to participate in the production of the “*hyggelig*” space by contributing furnishings, artifacts, written material, or images that represent the concept of “home” or “refuge.” Visitors to the exhibition will also be invited to share their own descriptions or narratives of home. In this way the exhibition will become a part and extension of the research process that I started in Denmark.

A focal point of the exhibition will be a book that collages the gathered information of this inquiry (field notes, quotes, bits of narrative, observations, commentary, images, etc.) My aim is for this book to do more than just document the travel. The book is to be a discursive tool - an assemblage of content for the exhibition visitor to reflect on, interpret and respond to. If I am successful in my effort, the book will spark creative speculation and trigger further questions. In this way, I will view the book as both a product of the travel research and a tool to perpetuate and expand the research.

This present document itself (a kind of model for the future exhibition book) is meant to extend the project’s thought process and inquiry. I have strived to make this report a stimulating, “frictional” encounter - a means to catalyze further discussion and interrogation - a tool to be used for inter-subjective meaning-making.

This study has come to form the foundation of a larger long-term personal research project to identify the particular qualities (material, atmospheric, sensory, phenomenological, spatial, etc.) that contribute to sociocultural wellness and contentment and that contribute to a sense of belonging to, or feeling “at home” in the world.







## Future Goals

My original intention for this project was to gather data via ethnographic research methods. Unfortunately my schedule did not allow me the time to do so properly and I was forced to make alternate plans. As I have an increasing personal interest in conducting ethnographic research and as *hygge* can, in my view, only really be effectively investigated via qualitative social research methods, it is my plan to continue to seek out further opportunities to do so. I believe that with the application of more rigorous ethnographic research methods I will be able to gain even greater insight into the qualities and consequences of *hygge* as related to wellness and cultural sustainability. Specifically, I would like to employ the following ethnographic research methods in future stages of this project:

- > in-depth qualitative interviews
- > focus groups
- > participant observation
- > photovoice/photo elicitation
- > the “go-along” method
- > drawing as qualitative research

Working on this project - traveling to Denmark and conversing directly with individuals about their memories and experiences of the spatial, atmospheric and social aspects of *hygge* - has sparked an ever-increasing personal interest in the possibilities of ethnography for design. In all future architectural research work that I do, I plan to utilize, as much as possible, social science research methods. It seems clear to me that this is the most valuable and effective way to study architecture if one wants to understand how the built environment shapes life and gives it meaning.

In the future I would also like to investigate what I would describe as the neuroscientific aspects of *hygge*. In particular I am interested in understanding the various perceptions and emotional effects of *hygge* in the context of the following concepts:

- > limbic resonance
- > emotional contagion
- > social / enactive / embodied / situated cognition
- > the transmission of affect

I consider this project to be an example of a form of translational research as it has been about an attempt to translate the themes and values of a cultural phenomenon into an informational format that might be directly useful to, or have a direct impact on the architectural discipline. In the pursuit of a truly sustainable built environment and a culture of wellness, the architectural profession must engage more intensely with culture at all scales and across all spectrums. Architects must understand how to gather and translate cultural wisdom and intelligence in ways that are consequential to the design of space.

# APPENDIX

## Primary Themes of *Hygge*

In an effort to avoid offering only a diminished approximation of what I found to be an incredibly complex and at times seeming paradoxical concept, I have chosen to identify those aspects of *hygge* that I feel are most significant, at least when viewed through an architectural lens.

In order to leave this discussion of *hygge* open to other possible interpretations - and to avoid an inadvertant but perhaps inevitable reduction of the concept by attempting to express its meaning in a standard descriptive format, I have instead endeavored to offer - with this collage-like index of field notes, quotes, observations, and questions - an opportunity for the reader to immerse herself in an assemblage of some of the primary themes associated with *hygge*. My hope is that with this index of expositions and propositions, the reader may reflect on these themes and construct her own personal conception of *hygge*.

The core meaning of *hygge* seems to exist at the center of a sprawling web of interconnected ideas and concerns. What follows is, in a sense, a set of interwoven interpretations and hypotheses as to what *hygge* is, how it is produced, effected, and understood, and the consequences it might have on the design and use of space.



# A Lexicon of *Hygge*

*a translative vocabulary*

A collection of words used to describe *hygge* in English:



- |               |             |               |                  |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|
| refuge        | comfortable | interiority   | history          |
| home          | snug        | authentic     | nourishing       |
| balance       | presence    | collaborative | atmosphere       |
| moderation    | memory      | ordinary      | unself-conscious |
| safe          | nostalgia   | introspective | natural          |
| harmonious    | equality    | peaceful      | empathy          |
| low-key       | friendly    | contentment   | amiable          |
| intimate      | welcoming   | authentic     | awareness        |
| cozy          | tranquil    | defense       | retreat          |
| homey         | encouraging | small         | custom           |
| collective    | place       | diminutive    | unpretentious    |
| informal      | soothing    | human scale   | calm             |
| enclosed      | trust       | open          | casual           |
| sincere       | civilized   | indulgent     | laid-back        |
| down-to-earth | sheltering  | slow          | hospitality      |
| warm          | egalitarian | ease          | shelter          |
| closeness     | interior    | security      | celebration      |
| protected     | solidarity  | identity      | easygoing        |
| rooted        | spontaneous | ritual        | cooperative      |
| convivial     | generosity  | personality   | shared           |
| relaxed       | attention   | familiarity   | agreeable        |
| earnest       | organic     | tradition     | free             |



## Place

*“What is a place after all but a bit of space that people like me have invested with meaning?” -Michael Pollan*

> *hygge* as that set of actions that make a space a place

> *hygge* as the habits, behaviors, activities that we use to create place

[we are always emplaced]

[situated body]

> *hygge* as a sensitivity to place

> *hygge* as a form of situated cognition

> *hygge* as the production of micro-places

> *hygge* as an interaction/encounter/event in which place-meaning is affirmed intersubjectively

*\*B. : “Aarhus is considered Denmark’s most hyggelig city.”*

> *hygge* as essential to Denmark’s place meaning - essential to each Danish individual’s identity or micro-place or self-as-place - *hygge* as the Danish social production of place

[An architecture or culture that distances the individual from nature and place will never be sustainable.]

[a conversation/social interaction/event as a ephemeral “place”]

[rootedness as a basic need]

[Grenen as an example of a place of shared, cultural significance]

[alienation versus attachment - the more attached we feel to a place - the better we treat it and maintain it and care for it]

*“... who we are is tangled up in where we are. We can’t extract the self from its surroundings, at least not without leaving something important behind.” -Nicholas Carr*

*“In terms of planning conditions, I think it’s important to ask: ‘Do we need our public space to reflect the values of our society?’ The challenge is to translate our idealistic dreams into how we organize our lives”. -Olafur Eliasson*





## Atmosphere

*“But what social consequences do such sharing and staging of atmospheres have?” -Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen*

*“...[A]tmosphere is a phenomenon or a condition that transgresses boundaries, such as subject and object. However, by transgressing boundaries it also connects people, places and things.” -Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen*

*“What are the effects of social issues people try to target through staging atmospheres, which cannot (either practically or politically) be obtained by other means of social interaction? And what are the effects of living in such staged environments?” -Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen*

*“What does an atmosphere make it possible to do, to perceive and to share?” -Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen*

> *hygge* as both material and immaterial phenomenon

> *hygge* as the staging of an atmosphere

[the ritual of lighting candles = the activating of an atmosphere]

[the social power of atmosphere]

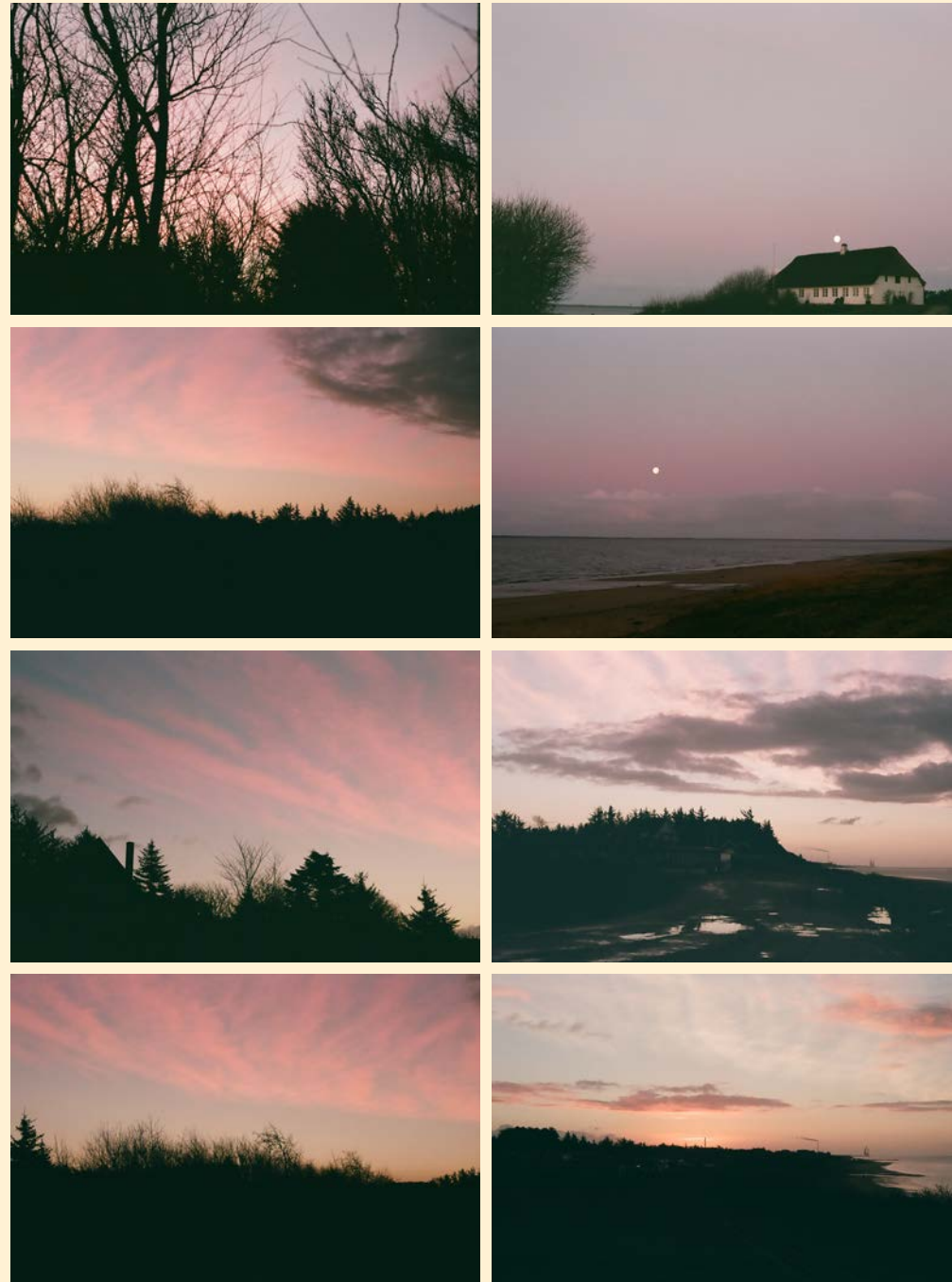
[ideal versus actual atmosphere]

[“the nature of atmosphere as a concept and experience of the in-betweenness of subject and object in which the emotional and sensory experience are central”]

*“Do we need to support the atmospheric ideas of a public space? What does a good atmosphere do? I’m generalizing a little bit by saying this, but I think there has been a shift in understanding that one cannot plan—in terms of city planning—atmosphere. Atmosphere is something that’s created by the people who use a space and generate spatial activity.” -Olafur Eliasson*

*What would it mean to design “for atmosphere” - as compared to designing for a program?*

*How might a room be designed to allow for a variety of atmospheres?*



## Presence / Awareness / Attention

*“The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness.” -Abraham Maslow*

> *Hygge* requires a shared commitment to the gathering or event, a setting aside of other concerns, a temporary forgetting of time.

> *hygge* as a variety of presence - a Danish variety? - an encouraging presence - an egalitarian presence - a generous presence - a sheltering presence

> *hygge* as a form of co-presence - a form of social presence

> *Hygge* is more than just a cosy atmosphere - it is also about cosy attitudes - attitudes of agreeableness - making the effort to be on the same page as those you are with - agreeing to come to a consensus, at least for a moment.

### ***How can the built environment contribute a heightened awareness of the environment?***

*\*attention and awareness of others in a gathering - if someone is upset or has a conflict and are preventing hygge [“if hygge is not achieved, the meeting will be very brief, short, business-like”]*

*\*the social rule of conforming to the mood of the majority of the group - each member of the social event has a responsibility to be aware and to not disrupt or prevent hygge - [“if you are the one preventing a gathering from being hyggelig, you will know it and you will not be comfortable”]*

[the dimension of engagement]

[nothing taken for granted]

[A practice of architecture that seeks to be entrenched, entangled with everyday life.]

*\*B. remembers a telephone conversation with her grandfather after six months of not talking to him - the emotions that dominate that sort of situation - she and her grandfather were both totally committed to the moment*

> *hygge* involves immediacy, a directness of experience

[an architecture that fine-tunes our perception in order that we might be able to better understand the world]

***Can architecture provide experiences that produce or contribute to the production of a new ecological or social awareness?***

[architectural practice as the production of varieties of presence]





## Equality

*“To be a hyggelig home, you need to have a certain level of comfort; including food, drink, and warmth. Some anthropologists link this to the Danish (and Scandinavian) welfare state and the high level of equality, since the difference in wealth and income is not as pronounced as in other societies.,,, In a way, hygge becomes something essentially Danish, where all are equal, but in a middle class way.” -Bente D. Knudsen*

*“It is only hyggeligt when you meet up with people with whom you feel safe enough to be yourself. Here you can share the vicissitudes of life, knowing that no one will challenge you on your opinions, and where their difficulties most likely resemble yours.” -Bente D. Knudsen*

> hygge as shared/mutual encouragement, shared confidence in each other

> hygge as a form of faith or trust in one another

> hygge as a way of advocating for fairness, and equity

> hygge as an agreement to collectively share time - to not create focuses of attention - rather all participants focus attention on the present moment

> hygge is about a mutual commitment to a gathering or event (presence)

[An architecture or culture that excludes any will never sustain itself.]

\*I.: *“Danes are not competitive - they try to keep everyone on the same level - as a society it seems to work well.”*

**How might a building be designed and constructed in such a way as to offer its occupants encouragement?**

*“Maybe the artist is the person who can allow for a process to shift back forth and who can think about our values when it comes to space. Do we want an inclusive space or do we want an exclusive space? Do we want to facilitate the meeting of two strangers, or do we want to prevent two strangers coming together? Is a stranger welcome?” -Olafur Eliasson*

**Could a building promote a sense of equality in its occupants?**

[varieties of equality]



## Naturalness

*“When a place is lifeless or unreal, there is almost always a mastermind behind it. It is so filled with the will of its maker that there is no room for its own nature.”* – Christopher Alexander

*“...[S]ome places can become so designed that they lose the ability to produce a desired atmosphere, which should, it seems, somehow instead be growing organically out of the locale and the people...”*  
-Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen

*“A home that is hyggeligt is neat, tidy, and clean. It doesn’t have to be a palace or mansion – indeed it must not be too grand or pretentious in any way. But neither can it be dirty, harsh or chaotic, as that would symbolise a poor working class home.”* - Bente D. Knudsen

> spaces or places that seem to have stories in them - as part of them - tend to be described as *hyggelig*

[the nature of order] [living form]

*“In an organic environment, every place is unique, and the different places also cooperate, with no parts left over, to create a global whole - a whole which can be identified by everyone who is part of it.”* -Christopher Alexander

> *hygge* as a form of unself-conscious behavior and attitude

> *hygge* cannot be forced, it must emerge naturally

> *hygge* as an atmosphere of authenticity

[fragile architecture]

[architecture that is emergent rather than programmatic]

*“But in practice master plans fail - because they create totalitarian order, not organic order. They are too rigid; they cannot easily adapt to the natural and unpredictable changes that inevitably arise in the life of a community.”* - Christopher Alexander

***How might we make the architectural design process an unself-conscious route to a living solution?***

*“There was a time when I experienced architecture without thinking about it... Memories like these contain the deepest architectural experiences I know. They are the reservoirs of the architectural atmospheres and images that I explore in my work as an architect.”* -Peter Zumthor





## History / Time

*"We know and remember who we are as historical beings by means of our constructed settings."*

-Juhani Pallasmaa

*"Home cannot be produced all at once; it has its time dimension and continuum and is a gradual product of the family's and individual's adaptation to the world."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

*"...haptic and multi-sensory architecture makes the experience of time healing and pleasurable."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

> *hyggelig* materials are materials that hold a trace - that elegantly register the passing of time

> *hygge* as the forgetting of time, the suspension of time

> *hygge* manifests itself differently depending on the season, the time of day, the weather, etc.

\*M.: *"When you are experiencing hygge, time warps, you lose track of time."*

\*M.: *"In a hyggelig moment, participants tend to lose track of time passing." / \*M.: "With hygge, the time flies."*

[Ideally, *hygge* is about transcending time - it's all the things one does to achieve harmony in a situation - either with others or by yourself - it's taking action and behaving in such a way to create a sphere of harmony/safety/security/comfort around oneself for a period of time - it's the things that are done to make oneself and each other feel at home (at ease, the sense of belonging)]

\*B.: *"The definition of hygge - the individual definition - changes as one grows older."*

\*B. spoke about the Old City Museum in Aarhus as being an especially *hyggelig* place.. This is representative of the Danish cultural ideal of remembering, preserving, celebrating, valuing the past.

\* M.: *"Hygge exists outside of time."*

[time as a limitation of cognition]

*"Time is what we are, what makes us, and simultaneously, it's the thing from which we're most estranged."*  
-Olafur Eliasson

[kairos : time charged with meaning because of its relationship to the end]

> *hygge* as the transcending of time - the humanizing of time



## Ritual / Tradition

*“Behavior is structured, as are perception and thought. Whatever else ritual signifies, it means (for animals) structured modes of signaling and interacting - aversive, warning, courting, grooming, territory-specifying, reassuring, and playful behavior.”* -Langdon Elsbree

*“A home is also a set of rituals, personal rhythms and routines of everyday life.”* -Juhani Pallasmaa

> rituals can activate *hygge*

> *hygge* as the act of tending a fire or a woodstove - the work of dimming lights, lighting candles, replacing candles

***Can architecture engender new rituals - or suggest new rituals - new patterns of living?***

> *hygge* as inherited rituals and traditions - those that are necessary to its production - especially the family traditions at Christmastime

> *hygge* as “something you’re brought up to know how to do” - Danish children are “taught to *hygge*”

> the tradition of the yearly Christmas beer release as an occasion for *hygge*

*\*When T. returns home he (almost immediately) goes around the apartment to light all of the small candles in all of the rooms. He burns candles all day, whenever he is at home. At night he leaves small “tea light” candles burning in the entry hall when he goes to sleep. These small candles burn for a few hours and then extinguish themselves.*

[the distinctly human ritual of establishing and consecrating a home]

> *hygge* as something Danes are “brought up to know how to do”

> *hygge* is not often consciously considered, it is an ingrained habit of behavior for Danes

> *Hygge* describes a space of ritual - a space of intersubjective co-construction of meaning (what does it mean to be Danish, what does it mean to part of this community, what does it mean to be content, what does it mean to be equal, what does it mean to cooperate, what does it mean to be sheltered and safe, what does it mean to dwell or inhabit?)

*\*B. : “How one defines *hygge* depends on how one was brought up -on one;s childhood - the traditions one learns as a child are carried through to adulthood.”*

> *hygge* becomes implicit when it is associated with certain rituals and traditions

*\*B.: “Hygge can be associated with certain days of the week - with regular events like when TV shows air. Children think of Friday as the most *hyggelig* day of the week - when the Disney TV show airs - when the whole family gathers to watch together and the kids get candy. For me, Saturday is the most *hyggelig* day of the week - that is when my friends and I usually get together.”*

*\*B. told of her family’s tradition of always eating breakfast together before going out to find and cut down a Christmas tree every year*

***Every activity could be thought of as an exercise - an attempt to be more involved in the world - to make oneself more accessible to the world. How can architecture participate in or support this idea?***

*\*L. told us that every year, at New Year’s the fishermen in the towns along the west coast of Jutland fire off their red warning flares - because they can no longer be used after a year - so the sky over the beach is filled with red glowing lights that float slowly downward since the flares have little parachutes on them*

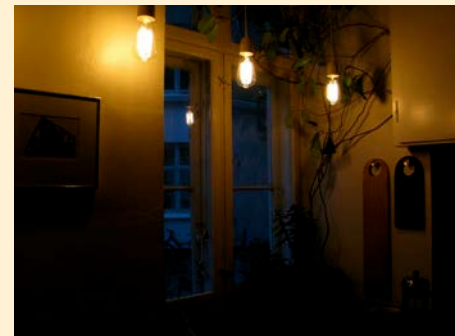
[A society that seeks to foster sustainable behavior and wellness might consider instituting meaningful environmental rituals or traditions into the lives of its young children - rituals that are meant to specifically enable each child with a sense of spatial agency - the knowledge and understanding that one can and should actively shape the space around oneself.]

[architecture as the setting for the rituals of life / the archetypal rituals that shape and define the design of architecture] [Architecture might also work to suggest new rituals of life.]

*\*F. : “I practice *hygge* when I wake up in the morning, before anyone else is up - I light candles or the fire and drink my first cup of coffee on the couch, maybe with a blanket - I really like that - to have the time alone to wake up, make plans for the day - away from everyone else for a bit.”*

> *hygge* as a practice of living, of dwelling

***Can architecture be designed to catalyze new rituals of sustainable and healthy living?***



## Light / Luminosity

*"...light is used socially to illuminate places, people and things, and hence affect the experiences and materiality of these, in culturally specific ways." -Bille & Sørensen*

*"...the way light is inhabited, manipulated, and used socially, as a way of creating interpersonal relationships and connecting people and things. This inhabitation and use is bound up in notions of luminosity, which here is understood as the luminous qualities of the relationship between light and sight." -Bille & Sørensen*

*"... how light is practised and inhabited. We argue that light is used to reveal people, places and things in culturally specific ways. Light is shed for – and not just on – the material environment (a similar argument can be found in Bolt, 2000). It is in one way or the other used in social life as a way of reflecting notions of identity, cultural heritage, morality, securing possessions, and revealing or concealing particular aspects of social life and so on." - Bille & Sørensen*

*"Following Merleau-Ponty, Ingold argues that 'light is the experience of inhabiting the world of the visible, and that its qualities – of brilliance and shade, tint and colour, and saturation – are variations, upon this experience'" - Bille, Sørensen*

> the candle as the most common symbol associated with *hygge*

*\*candles everywhere - in bars, in cafes, in restaurants*

> *hygge* is heavily associated with light (but always requires more than just the right lightscape)

> *hygge* involves the orchestration of light, darkness, glow

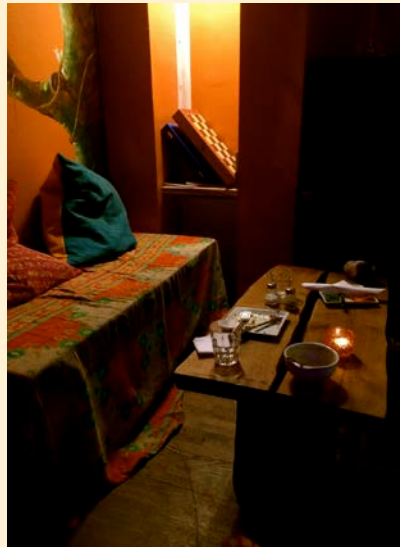
[qualitative versus quantitative]

> light as the primary operative material in the construction of a *hyggelig* setting

[the candles as "living light"]

> *hygge* as a particular kind of lightscape - one conducive to peaceful security

[a preference for dim light, shadows] [incandescent over fluorescent]



> a sphere of light to enclose a *hyggelig* space [light as boundary]

> the use of light to carve out a space for *hygge*

[the importance of custom, personal light / light as a tool or marker of identity]

[light as a way to create a sense of self]

[light as a tool for creating social intimacy]

***Can architects design a building's lighting as a set of tools to be used by the occupant?***

[light as a way to be alone but connected]

[light used to create a feeling of community, as a way of communicating (candles in windows for others to see)]

*\*Every night, before going to bed, T. would light small tea candles in the hallway.*

*\*F. "It is considered improper not to light candles."*

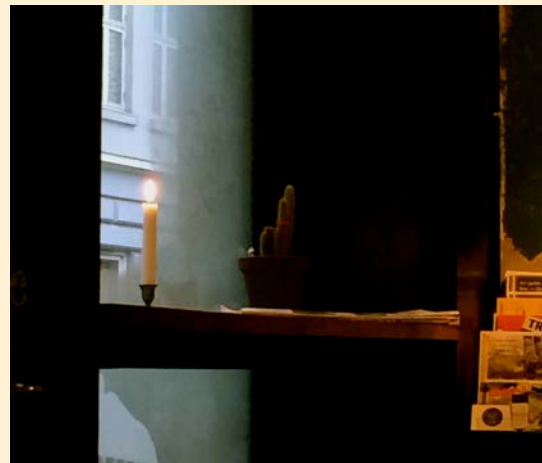
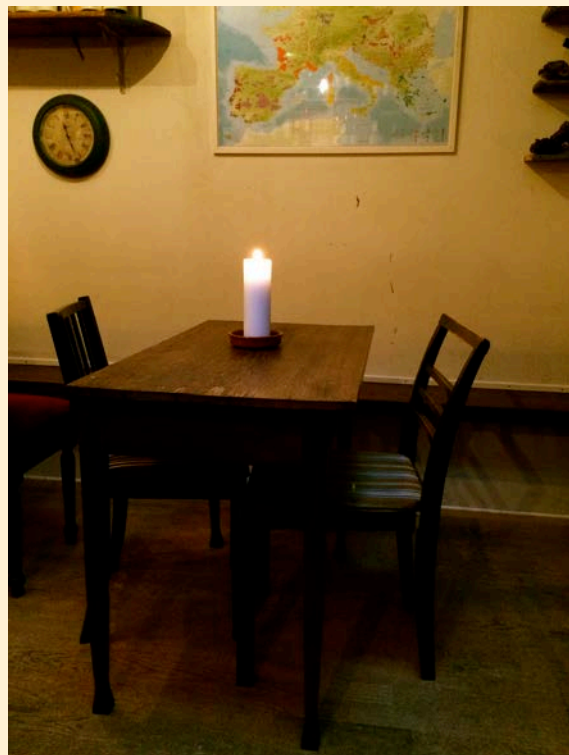
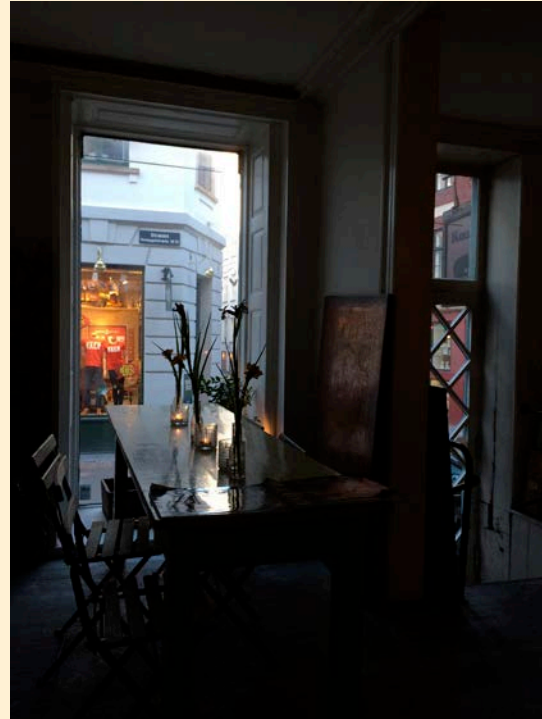
*\*F.: "The candles - the flames - are 'company.'"*

[the candle as a tool for reverie and imagination]

["in praise of shadows"]

***How might architects give occupants more control over light - and how should "control" be defined?***





## Agency

*"Light is more than just a medium; it evokes agency."* -Bille & Sørensen

*"The emotional impact is related to an act, not an object or a visual or figural element. The phenomenology of architecture is founded on verbs rather than nouns. The approaching of the house, not the facade, the act of entering, not the door; the act of looking out of the window, not the window itself; or the act of gathering around rather than the hearth or the table as such seems to trigger our strongest emotions."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

*"It is frustrating to be forced to live in a space that we cannot recognize or mark as our personal territory."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

[By actively creating *hyggelig* settings and situations we are acting politically - we are making a statement about what we want a certain space and segment of time to be like.] [spatial agency as the ability to make meaning with and through space - through the inhabitation of space - the appropriation of space]

[Christiania - the tradition of self-building] [vernacular architecture]

[Hygge is about the individual's awareness, attention, willingness and commitment to curate and shape the space around her - at its most fundamental, it's the appropriation of a space as home - the way we organize, decorate and use the space of our homes - but it's also about curating - acting on one's immediate environment wherever one finds oneself in the world - the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the company you keep, the way you organize your desk at work, the way you keep your car...]

> *hygge* as a kind of spatial literacy - a sensory literacy - an emotional literacy / intelligence

*"Feelings are not static moments, feelings are participatory; they're actions with consequences."* -Olafur Eliasson

[feelings are actions] [feelings have a productive, extrovert dimension]

[knowing what makes one comfortable as a form of agency (wellness depends on the agency of the individual)]

*\*L. + B. live in a very old restored farmhouse. L. has been renovating it over the 20 years he has owned the property. All the design decisions in those 20 years have been made by him.*

[By actively creating *hyggelig* settings and situations are we making acting in a political way - are we making a statement about what we want a space or a place to be like?]

***Could the production of architecture be organized to better allow for, encourage and advocate for agency?***

*"... the deepest form of understanding available to us is not mere perceptual cognition, but, rather, a handling, using, and taking care of things, which has its own kind of 'knowledge'."* -Martin Heidegger

[open access architecture]



## Indulgence

*“Foreigners are often surprised by the amount of homemade cake and bread made and consumed by Danes. Funnily enough, the feeling of homeliness is deeply rooted in homemade food, cake, and sweets. The more personal elements you can bring into the context of something to do with a home, the more hyggeligt it is. The personal elements create a more authentic feeling and local universe of togetherness. Jeppe tells me, “the lovely smell of homemade cake hangs in the air, underlining that what you are eating comes from this home, thereby the feeling of uniqueness is enhanced, you can only have it here, and it is far away from mass production (and the commercial outside world). All this adds to the hygge feeling.” -Bente D. Knudsen*

> *hygge* as the warmth and sensuousness of shared foods and drink

[glögg (mulled wine)]

[aquavit (liquor)]

[the Slow Food Movement / the Slow Architecture Movement]

> *hygge* as a nourishing experience

> *hygge* as the enjoyment of “comfort food”

*“M. : Hygge can be enjoying food that is special - something that you don’t often have.”*

*\*L. + B. : “Traditionally, if you had people ‘over for coffee,’ it meant lots of cake - several cakes.”*

*\*T. : “Hygge is related to the anticipation of an event - the preparing of a special meal.”*

***How might architecture promote a culture of mindful, joyful consumption?***

[an architecture to be savored]





## Materiality

*“The marks of a personal history are visible and we respond emotionally to them. Perhaps they captivate us because it puts a face and shape to an abstract concept such as time.” -Roderick Kemsley/Christopher Platt*

> *hygge* as both material and immaterial phenomenon

> *hyggelig* material as material that can hold a trace

> *hyggelig* material that records and registers the passing of time

[the rootedness and fixity of a durable material]

*How might architecture support a culture of reclamation and restoration?*

> *hyggelig* as the aesthetics of the second-hand, the reclaimed, restored

> *hyggelig* materials as natural, collected, handmade, salvaged, worn

> *hyggelig* material as non-uniform, unique, personalized, idiosyncratic

[cultural and social patina]

[the philosophy of wabi-sabi] [into and out of nothingness] [nothing is finished]  
[imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete]

[analog, tactile technologies] [materials and objects with a certain tactility]

[thrift stores, second-hand stores, antique stores]

\*B. *“... the hygge-ness of the neighborhood - the brick, cobblestone paving, the small houses built very close together...”*

[the emotional value of experiencing elegant weathering]

*How might the built environment foster a deep care and respect for the world’s natural materials?*

*How might a building express the value of durability?*

[humble, modest]



## Intimacy

*"Home is a collection and concretization of personal images of protection and intimacy that help us recognize and remember who we are."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

> *hygge* as embodied shelteredness

> *hygge* as shared or social intimacy / shared or social daydreaming

[proxemics] [social heat]

> *hygge* as shared warmth - physical and emotional

> *hygge* as the act of drawing close

> *hygge* as nourishing togetherness

> *hygge* as an emotional contagion

> *hygge* as a social negotiation

> *hygge* as a way of being-in-the-world with

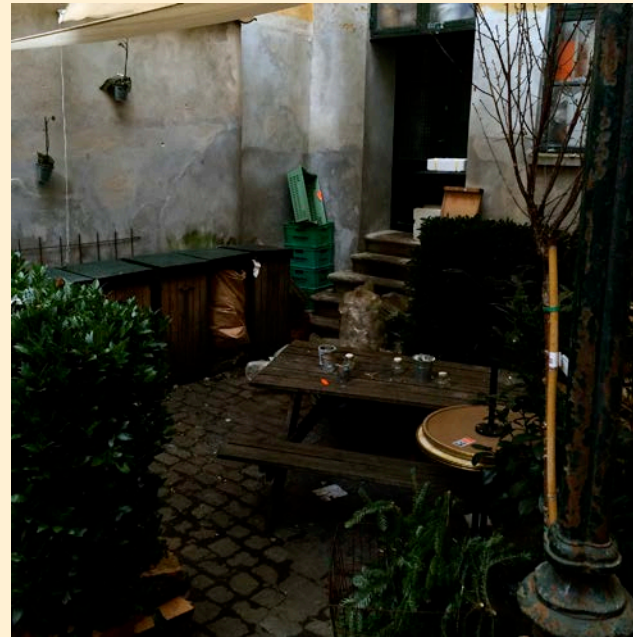
> *hygge* as a form of "perceiving with others"

*"... the surroundings are thus to a certain extent produced when we feel them, creating an exchange between individual and surroundings that makes the two co-relative. The specific context is tied to our feelings, and as the feelings change, so does the context."* -Olafur Eliasson

> *hygge* as an emphasis on the attunement to each other's moods and feelings - a recognition of the importance of collective harmony and mutual commitment

\*B. : *"At home, gathered around the fireplace is the epitome of hygge."*

\*When I asked P. if the cafe we had met in felt *hyggelig* to her she said *"It's a bit too loud to be hyggelig - and the way we were seated was not ideal (we were on bar stools, in an awkward circle, there was not table between us, it was hard to get close to each other) - but the people and the topic of conversation made it hyggelig"* (referring to our meeting to discuss *hygge*) (the cafe had high ceilings, sleek furniture and finishes, there was pop music playing, it was crowded, there was a lot of noise - talking and the sound of dishes...)



## Openness / Willingness

*\*E. "Hygge is about being open to the unexpected."*

> *hygge* as the experience of an uncommon or rarely visited place - or an unusual or rare event

> *hygge* as the exploration of a new place together

*\*B. : "You can hygge when traveling."*

*\*B. : "Those unexpected experiences or meetings that sometimes happen when you are backpacking or traveling could be described as hyggelig."*

*\*F. spoke about taking his children to different islands and wildernesses around Denmark to hike and camp. He noted the remoteness of such places and spoke of this sort of experience with his kids as being representative of "the ideal shared activity" - as a hyggelig activity*

*\*travel + hygge: travel that is mostly "sightseeing" versus travel that is less structured and more open to serendipitous, unexpected interactions, encounters with total strangers - travel that seeks the unknown or is at least open, attuned to, always prepared for the unknown*

[traveling with a certain kind of trust or faith]

[travel as a particular kind of act that exposes oneself to certain categories of experiences and encounters with the world - traveling with a certain easy, open, receiving, non-judgemental behavior]

> *hygge* as a phenomena experienced both indoors and out (the refuges that nature/wilderness may offer us - those natural places that we feel we belong to - the collective memory of our primal roots in the wild)

*\*E. : "For me, hygge is all about the human interaction - the pleasantness of friends dropping in unexpected."*

*\*met E. at Grenen - he offered to take a photograph of us and after asking why we were in Denmark he shouted over the wind: "This is hygge!" - to be there on that day was very special because of the storm : "Being here is a very special thing - you have to be open to hyggelig experiences / he was born in Skagen and returns to Grenen about once a week with his wife - "We like to along the water and look for driftwood and things." - he spoke of the "talking kitchen" and the "day living room" as the most hyggelig parts of the house - he and his wife live in a small house (9m x 9m) that he built himself*

*"What it all boils down to, is does a society trust that abstract values, emotional values, creativity, and unpredictability belong in public space? Is our public space highly regulated, predictable, and about health and safety in terms of preventing people from being surprised? Does the space nurture the possibility of a surprise or is that too much of a risk?" -Olafur Eliasson*







## Slowness

*“Architecture is not only about domesticating space’, writes Karsten Harries, Professor of Philosophy at Yale University, ‘It is also a deep defence against the terror of time. The language of beauty is essentially the language of timeless reality.’ Architecture’s task to provide us with our domicile in space is recognized by most architects, but its second task in mediating our relation with the frighteningly ephemeral dimension of time is usually disregarded.” -Juhani Pallasmaa*

> *hygge* as a slower pace of life - shared meals, if they are to be *hyggelig*, are long, slow affairs - a fast pace seems to be antithetical to *hygge*

> *hygge* as a celebration of slowness [in praise of slowness]

> *hygge* as a kind of nourishing friction - a force that causes us to slow down, for our own good

*\*B. related how slow and leisurely and “drawn out” meals generally are when she is with her Danish friends or family - in the States, she experienced some formal meals - even a Thanksgiving dinner - as a much quicker affair - “as though everyone was just trying to get the meal over and done with” - for her, at least, hygge is much more closely related to the “really long, slow meals” she generally experiences with family and close friends in Denmark*

*\*any sort of rushing implies only partial commitment to the event or social activity*

*“But architecture is about thinking. It’s about slowness in some way. You need time. The bad thing about computers is that they make everything run very fast.” -Renzo Piano*

*What would an architecture that celebrates and encourages slowness be like?*

*How do we reintroduce a measure of slowness into the architectural production process?*

[take your time]

*“The great benefit of slowing down is reclaiming the time and tranquility to make meaningful connections--with people, with culture, with work, with nature, with our own bodies and minds.” -Carl Honoré*

*“Being Slow means that you control the rhythms of your own life. You decide how fast you have to go in any given context. If today I want to go fast, I go fast; if tomorrow I want to go slow, I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own tempos.” -Carl Honoré*



## Community

*“Perichoresis means that the milieu of the persons is entirely the relationship itself,” he writes, envisioning love as a total mutual absorption. The need for spheres - for meanings, symbols, contexts - is what is primary for human beings.”* -Adam Kirsch (quoting Peter Sloterdijk)

> *hygge* as collective/communal wellness - community-supported wellness

> *hygge* as a form of social presence, co-presence

> *hygge* as a form of social cognition

[the resilience of community, social cohesion as a significant factor in resiliency]

> to experience *hygge* is to experience belonging - and at the same time to experience the sense of responsibility and care for the things that belong to one

> *hygge* as a form of inter-subjective meaning-making

[Our consciousnesses are interwoven - we affect each other more than we can ever understand.]

[collective identification versus individual identification - one identifies oneself through their social relations and the social groups to which he belongs - the social space as the primary space of identity]

> *hygge* as a form of perceiving with others

[the tradition of cohousing - the cohousing movement was started in Denmark]

[the important effects of third places/spaces]

[an architecture that emphasizes collectivity over individuality]

[an architecture that expresses collectivity - the possibility for effective collective efforts for change]

[a sense of unity as a basic need]

***How can architects work to create buildings and spaces better suited for small gatherings - the building blocks of community?***

*“I continuously exchange my private being for a shared reality. I – sensorium, feelings, memories, convictions, values, thoughts, uncertainties – only am in relation to the collective.”* -Olafur Eliasson

[In any spatial setting the moods and emotions of the inhabitants present will have significant influence on any/all persons’ experience of the physical space.(being drunk and in love under the stars versus being sober and lonely under the stars)]

[collective effervescence]

[positivity resonance]

***How can architecture be designed to make humans participate in active, meaningful ways?***

***What would an architecture of ‘togetherness’ look like? How can architecture provide the potential for different kinds and scales of togetherness?***

[Wellness has to begin with community, connection, social cohesion - these things provide the individual with the support and encouragement necessary for emotional health, which supports and reinforces physical health.]

*“For a public space to be truly public, it needs the confidence and trust of civic activity.”* -Olafur Eliasson

*“This is a fundamental view of the world. It says that when you build a thing you cannot merely build that thing in isolation, but must repair the world around it, and within it, so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent, and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature, as you make it.”* -Christopher Alexander

[networked, collaborative, and inclusive models of architecture]

[architecture as a crowd-sourced endeavor]



walking to Grenen \_ Skagen

## Language

“...[T]he form *hygge* is a late 19th Century loan, derived from a Norwegian verb meaning ‘to console, to encourage.’” -Carsten Levisen

> *hygge* as a form of communication - a form of language that is less declarative, less assertive, more subjective

> sometime the explicit naming or announcing of an atmosphere as *hyggelig* has the power to catalyze *hygge*

> *hygge* as a language of encouragement, and trust

“The modern Danish word “*hygge*” originates from “*hyggja, hycgan, hugjan*” (Old Norse, Old English, Gothic) with the meaning “*think, consider, feel*”. The word still exist in Middle Scottish as “*huik*” (regard, consider). Thus, the concept of the word is a state of mind, created by certain rituals in behaviour and physical surroundings. This is a Proto Norse way of live which is probably why so few tribes master the concept and does not have a proper word to express the state of mind.” -Rebecca Parker Payne

> *hygge* as a loan word - a loaned cultural concept to frame our work as architects

[the limits of language - our inability to express what we feel]

***Can we create a new language of architectural practice for a new perspective on the role of the architect, with a new understanding of wellness and social sustainability?***

[the significance and cultural effects of the widespread collective use of a malleable/dynamic/fluid term like *hygge*]

> *hygge* as a term that can be personalized or individualized and associated with different things

[the use of language in a social ecology to collectively produce a certain social atmosphere]

[the significance of having a distinct, particular cultural language for certain experiences and atmospheres that work to make these experiences and atmospheres a cultural goal - a socio-spatial state to be collectively strived for, guarded, valued]

[the language processes we use to orient or reorient ourselves to the world]



*“Danes use the word hygge a lot. For example, when meeting up again after the last get-together, the phrase *det var hyggeligt* is often used. Or when you leave someone’s company Danes often say, *kan du hygge dig*. Translating such expressions into “what a great time” and “have a cosy time” just don’t give the same feel.” -Bente D. Knudsen*

*How might architects develop a language of encouragement?*

*Can architecture participate in the shaping of new forms of language or communication? Can the built environment affect the way we share our ideas, our desires, our fears, our goals, our meanings?*

*Do architects need a lexicon of specialized terms to bring concerns about social health and wellness into the design process?*

> *hygge* as a narrative - a way of telling a story about oneself

[language that produces presence / the language of presence]

[Architects need to become better with language, better with communication - more like storytellers - in order to create spaces that produce potential for meaning-making, ritual, participation, and involvement.]

*How do we design for narratives of wellness?*

[the poetics of sustainability] [the poetics of wellness]

[building stories]

[language as a tool with which we can, if we choose to, make anything beautiful]

[*Hygge* furnishes the Danish culture with a language for producing positivity resonance.]

[architecture as language] [language as architecture]

[the spell of sensuous language] [the spell of sensuous architecture]

*“To work our way towards a shared language once again, we must first learn how to discover patterns which are deep, and capable of generating life.” -Christopher Alexander*

[words, stories as refuge]



## Empathy

*“empathy as a unique and irreducible kind of intentional experience”* -Edith Stein

*“the intertwining of my life with the other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others...”* -Maurice Merleau-Ponty

> *hygge* requires a certain level of intention

> *hygge* as the ability to perceive and share in the feelings of others

> *hygge* as a demonstration of the fact that empathy requires embodied co-presence, social presence

> *hygge* as empathic space, empathic interaction

[empathy with others and with the physical surroundings - including the inanimate things in one's environment]

> *hygge* as an emphasis on empathy - *hygge* as empathic space

> *hygge* as the context / setting for empathic behavior - the spatial and material features of a setting cue one to be *hyggelig*, to behave empathically

[objects that evoke empathy]

> *hygge* as “a readiness to be moved”

> *hygge* requires of its participants a readiness to be present, aware, empathic

[see yourself as part of a larger system]

*\*the story about the aunt and her inflexible, uncompromising Christmas setting and attitude - the tree is decorated with red and gold only - to be uncompromising is not hygge*

***Could a room or space be designed specifically for empathic social interaction? What would this mean?  
Could specific design patterns for empathic space be identified?***

*\*“Danes may seem rude - they keep themselves closed-off until they feel safe comfortable or safe - but then they let you in in a genuine way” ... “as compared to Americans who tend to be very open at first but are superficial about what they share with you - it is a kind of phony politeness...”*

[Could it be that a society that cultivates the sort of social values that are associated with *hygge* also cultivates things like empathy and understanding of the self and the other - and that, because of this, this society is comprised of more people who understand themselves and are therefore healthier mentally and emotionally, and that this contributes to broadly sustainable behavior in that society?]

[Could it be that the manner in which we interact with each other - the manner in which we are social - determines the manner in which we understand ourselves and others, which in turn determines the manner in which we perceive the world, which dictates how we interact with the world and how we behave in the world?]

[No building or space or place is ever “complete” - the construction of space and the built environment is largely an ongoing social process - all space is shaped by the humans who inhabit it.]

*“The building is less a box of architectural tricks than, perhaps more accurately, a box of architectural invitations; invitations to incorporate it into ourselves and ourselves into it.”* -Roderick Kemsley

[the built environment as an extension of ourselves - to care for our environment is to care for ourselves and vice versa - to have wellness in our bodies we must have wellness in our environment]

[emotionally durable architecture]

*“There is a demand that you make the effort to see yourself in the context of the situation you're in. It could be a micro context: What does it mean when I'm sharing a space with another person? There could also be a macro view: How do I fit into the world, and how do my actions impact the global climate? Reflexivity is actually hard work.”* - Olafur Eliasson

[architectural research as a practice of embodied empathy]

*“Love unfolds and reverberates between and among people – within interpersonal transactions – and thereby belong to all parties involved, and to the metaphorical connective tissue that binds them together, albeit temporarily. ... More than any other positive emotion, then, love belongs not to one person, but to pairs or groups of people. It resides within connections.”* -Barbara Fredrickson

[an architecture that reconnects us to the “more-than-human world”]

## Memory / Nostalgia

*"It is evident that home is not an object, a building, but a diffuse and complex condition that integrates memories and images, desires and fears, the past the the present."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

*"Home is a staging of personal memory."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

*"Our imagination fills out compartments of rooms and buildings with memories and turns them into own personal territories."* -Juhani Pallasmaa

*\*B. : "When I moved to the States I brought some small things that my grandmother had given me with me - she had just passed away..."*

> *hygge* as objects, keepsakes with embedded memories that shape the atmosphere - objects with affective presence

[the collective memory of Danish culture]

[memories as projections of one's life and expectations]

> *hygge* as an activity of restorative nostalgia

["towards a tactile and feminine sensibility"]

[architecture/the built environment as memory storage - we embed memories into our material surroundings]

*\*At the cottage in Esbjerg... the olfactory experience of the wood pile - the memories it triggers for me - of gathering kindling in the woods when I was younger - the act of walking around in the woods gathering small sticks, twigs, barks...*

*\*While we talked, B. saw a worker walk past carrying green beer crates that said Hancock Brewery on them - this instantly triggered a memory of her childhood home, which was located next to the brewery. She also vividly remembers the unpleasant smell of the brewery - which she would smell every time she cycled past it. She noted that this smell and any similar smell triggers happy memories for her - it is "a instantaneous happy reaction."*

*\*T.'s place has many "mindes" on display - old family portraits, what look to be original (amateurly produced) paintings, souvenirs from travel to African? locales...*



## Things / Objects

*“Things are part of the intimate human inhabitation and experience of the world.” -Bille, Sørensen*

*“the uncommon beauty of common things” - Eames*

[evocative objects]

[the function of ornament - storage devices for our memories, our identities, producers of atmosphere]

> *hygge* as objects that evoke meaning, that store identity

[what is collected, kept - what stores memories]

*\*L. + B. have many plants in their home - in every room. Plants are associated with hygge - hyacinth is a very traditional Christmas and New Year plant - it can survive the cold - “Plants are very hygge.”*

[the sociality of things]

[an argument for the love of things - for a certain kind of consumption - the collecting and cherishing of artifacts, keepsakes, souvenirs - useless objects - ornaments]

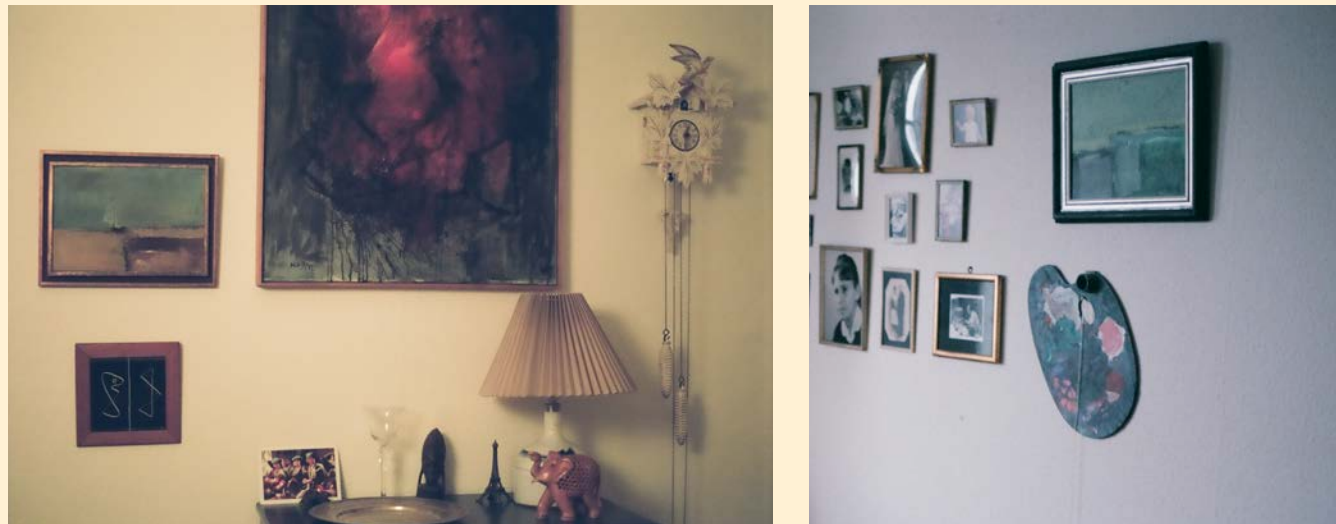
*“... the productive intermingling of objects and spaces in human life.” -Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen*

*“Bohme defines the presence of things not as their mere factual existence as subjects or objects, but in terms of the ways they make their presence perceptible; a thing is articulated not as being-there or not-being-there, but instead as ‘the ways in which it goes forth from itself.’ These ways of ‘going forth’ from itself is what he terms ‘the ecstasies of the thing,’ i.e. the way a thing qualitatively and sensuously stands out from itself. In this sense, atmospheres are the perceived quality of a situation, made up by the constellation of people and things. Atmospheres, he argues, are ‘spheres of the presence of something, their reality in space.’” -Bille, Bjerregaard, Sorensen*

*\*the popularity of antique stores and second-hand stores*

*\*M. : “A record player is be a very hyggelig thing to have in your home.”*

[the function of ornament]







Tivoli Gardens \_ Copenhagen

## Contentment / Comfort / Ease

*\*guy at car rental place: said with an unsmiling, completely straight face and serious tone: "I think I'm one of the happiest people in the world - I don't know about the rest of Denmark..."*

- > *hygge* as an expression of contentment and positivity
- > *hygge* as the act of appreciating what one has
- > *hygge* as the act of focusing on positivity, a form of optimism
- > *hygge* as an "effortless thing"

[Sustainable behavior and wellness depend on being content with what you have.]

*\*T. "I can have hygge by being alone with a book."*

*"Contentment may be considered as synonymous with happiness but is more basic or prior to happiness that can be derived from outer achievement or self-improvement. For this reason, colloquially, contentment is simply a way of accepting one's life state and being grateful or happy with it. Many see contentment as an attitude towards situations. It may even be argued that this attitude of contentment leads to more positive outcomes as a result of the relaxation that goes with being contented."* -Michael Graham

*\*the two young (college-aged) boys working at the car rental place in Esbjerg: "Hygge is relaxed - it is being with anyone who makes you feel relaxed. Candles are not necessary. ... This - being at work, working her, is hygge because it's relaxed, it's laid-back..." (the two seem to be friends - there is music playing in the back room - music of their choosing, it seems fair to say / they are not wearing uniforms or special clothes - just their own clothes / no one else seems to be working there at the moment / both are from Esbjerg, grew up there / they seem to be very used to working with each other - there is a familiarity there - they may also be good friends outside of work / they do not seem the least bit rushed in their work - they are in control of their time and pace / the space itself (Europcar) does not feel particularly cozy, intimate or warm at all (fluorescent lighting, ec.) - it feels sterile and without personality - it seems that the hygge exists in the interaction between these two co-workers - it is in their moods and behavior*

## Identity

“*We know and remember who we are as historical beings by means of our constructed settings.*”  
-Juhani Pallasmaa

> *hygge* as an act of producing (and reproducing) identity (of self and others simultaneously)

> *hygge* encourages one to reveal one’s authentic self/identity

> *hygge* is, allows for, shared identity - communal identity

> *hygge* emphasizes that one’s identity is intertwined with that of others - *hygge* is a celebration of this fact

> you can “*hygge yourself*” - experience *hygge* in solitude - this relates to self-care

> *hygge* as an act of producing (and reproducing) identity (of self and others simultaneously)

> *hygge* as a process of identification (with certain values)

[the social space/event as the primary space of identification]

“*We see things not as they are, but as we are.*” -Iain Ballantyne

[one shapes/appropriates his space to reflect his identity/personality - the customization of space is a method of expressing identity - one stores her identity in her personal space and material possessions]

[sustainability/stewardship/responsibility/accountability as issues of identity]

[The manner in which we interact with each other - the manner in which we are social - determines the manner in which we understand ourselves and others, which determines the manner in which we perceive the world, which dictates how we interact with the world, how we behave in the world.]

*\*the importance of being able to customize your home/space - the popularity of open-plan lofts that allow people to organize the space however they want*

“*Home is an expression of personality and family and their very unique patterns of life. Consequently, the essence of home is closer to life itself than to artefact.*” -Juhani Pallasmaa

**What might it mean for architecture to be co-produced by its inhabitant?**

**Can architects provide spaces that not only allow appropriation and projection of identity, but encourage it, or demand it?**

“*... personal space expresses the personality to the outside world, but, equally important, it strengthens the dweller’s self-image and concretizes his world order.*” -Juhani Pallasmaa

> *hygge* as the act of “decorating or ornamenting a space with your mood or spirit or emotion”

“*Home is a projection and basis of identity, not only of the individual but also of the family. But homes, the mere secrecy of private lives concealed from the public eye, also structure social life.*”  
-Juhani Pallasmaa

“*The interdependence of identity and context is so strong that psychologists speak of a ‘situational personality.’*”  
-Juhani Pallasmaa

“*Architecture can either tolerate and encourage personalization or stifle it.*” -Juhani Pallasmaa

[the identities afforded by architecture]

> *hygge* as a cultural identifier - does any other culture use a socio-spatial concept like *hygge* as part of it’s identity?

“*...the joy and satisfaction of apprehending the world around us - and of making that world a part of us.*”  
-Nicholas Carr

*\*M. : “Danes tend to seek out different / “quirky” apartments to rent - there is an emphasis on unique, personalized space.”*

[the function of style]

“*The substance of home is secreted, as it were, upon the framework of the dwelling by the dweller.*”  
-Juhani Pallasmaa

[To understand our place, our space, our environment, our world, is to understand ourselves, and vice versa.]

[a sense of identity as a basic need]

[sustainability as an issue of identity]

**Does architecture that is explicitly, obviously sustainable in some significant way create an identity of sustainability for those who inhabit it?**

“*The self is rarely fixed. It has a protean quality. It emerges through personal exploration, and it shifts with circumstances.*” -Nicholas Carr

[each individual has multiple identities - and different rituals for each]



## Interiority

*“The symbolic air conditioning of the shared space is the primal production of every society. “Law, custom, ritual, and art are ways we create such nurturing spheres, which for Sloterdijk are not so much topological figures as emotional and spiritual micro-climates: “The sphere is the interior, disclosed, shared realm inhabited by humans - in so far as they succeed in becoming humans.” -Adam Kirsch (with Peter Sloterdijk quotes)*

[literal and figurative interiors - the interior of a room, the interior of a relationship, the interior of an interaction, the interior of one’s being]

[human scale]

> *hygge* as the experience of being surrounded - contained - held

> *hygge* as projection or mapping of the individual’s interior onto the surrounding environment

[social interior]

> *hygge* as “interior” space, or a space defined by the boundaries of a lamp’s glow, or the location of our companions, as a refuge away from the endless distractions and phenomena of the everyday world - away from the endless streams of mediated information of the digital age

[the non-tangible boundaries of a social interaction]

> a *hyggelig* event is defined by a sense of enclosure, interiority, a bounded space

*How might a larger, open space be designed to contain within it the potentialities of many individual “interiors?”*



## Home / Dwelling / Refuge

*“We build dwellings that, perhaps, satisfy most of our physical needs, but which do not house our mind.”*

-Juhani Pallasmaa

*“Indeed, in our houses we have nooks and corners in which we like to curl up comfortably. To curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb to inhabit, and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity.”*

-Gaston Bachelard

*“Come what may the house helps us to say: I will be an inhabitant of the world, in spite of the world.”*

-Gaston Bachelard

[the home as the spatialization of the personal or family identity]

[the house as tool]

> *hygge* as the uniquely Danish way of being at home in the world -the particularly Danish way of inhabiting the world

[The setting of a space - the arranging of a space - the appropriation of a space - the creation of an atmosphere to effect a particular mood - is poetic creation - a form of building, and the same as dwelling. To actively and consciously engage in the shaping of the spaces and environments in which one lives, is to dwell poetically. To exercise a certain level of involvement, presence, and agency in the physical world is to dwell poetically. The establishment and consecration of a home - the process of shaping and arranging a space to reflect one’s identity and provide one with a personalized sense of comfort and security is to dwell poetically. To maintain certain rituals and traditions of inhabiting space and place is to dwell poetically. *Hygge* is a model of a way to dwell poetically.]

***How can architects - in an attempt to contribute to the creation of a sustainable culture - teach individuals to dwell poetically? what would the taking-on of this responsibility mean for current modes of architectural design and production? Would the architect becomes less of a detached, single creative entity and more of an embedded leader or educator?***

[Architects can lead others in the design and construction of the built environment - they cannot truly exist as separate visionaries or individual creators - but as collaborators - encouraging and inspiring sustainable modes of creation and dwelling.]

[imagine all activities as ways of dwelling - all spaces as forms of dwelling places]

> *hygge* as a cultural form of meaning-making agency - a culturally inherited agency - a learned behavior that ideally allows the individual to create place

*“Other cultures also have words to characterise a certain atmosphere; in English the words used would be cosy or convivial. However, according to Jeppe, translating hygge into homeyness would be more correct as the home in the Scandinavian sense is the place where you can be yourself and shut out the big, dark, and dangerous world outside. Homeyness also implies some kind of community feeling, a togetherness, which is also part of the hygge concept.”* -Bente D. Knudsen

> *hygge* as a safe haven

*“The origin of the word hygge is Norwegian and old Nordic. It means seeking refuge, protection, and shelter from the raging of the outside elements. Hygge came into use in the Danish language in the 18th century. It is very much a middleclass concept.”* -Bente D. Knudsen

[*kolonihave*: a self-built “cottage”]

> Christiania as a model of communal *hyggelig* agency

[The practice of architecture as the building of models of every meaning, every possible emotion of living, of being in the world.]

[Architecture as a technology devised by man to mediate his relationship to the natural world.]

***What might it mean to dwell poetically? Can architecture be designed to teach its inhabitants to dwell poetically?***

> a sense of safety is essential to *hygge*

[comfort and security as a collective goal in a sustainable culture]

> *hygge* as sanctuary - physical sanctuary, social sanctuary, emotional sanctuary

*“Martin Heidegger claimed ‘dwelling to be a peaceful accomodation between individuals and the world.’”*  
-Roderick Kemsley/Christopher Platt



[the sound of the wood stove - its living sound, its pulse as sensory comfort]

*How might architects create the potential for feelings of sanctuary?*

*“One of the things we hit upon was the quality of a host. That is, the role of the architect, or the designer, is that of a very good, thoughtful host, all of whose energy goes into trying to anticipate the needs of his guests—those who enter the building and use the objects in it. We decided that this was an essential ingredient in the design of a building or a useful object.” -Charles Eames*

> *hygge* as a manifestation of a guest/host relationship - each participant in a *hyggelig* setting is both a guest and host - each participant acts as a host and treats every other participant as a guest

[hospitable architecture]

*\*T. shared the story of when he went to the Boundary Waters with his brother, his son-in-law and his son-in-law's father on a canoe trip. The 4 of them became very close in a very short amount of time because they were together in the middle of nowhere and thus they had to trust and depend on each other. It was a *hyggelig* experience being in the wilderness together - despite the inherent danger and risk. They felt safe and secure in each other's presence.*

[the importance of feeling at home in a place - the importance of having a sense of belonging to the world - to the place or the “local earth” where we are]

[“feeling at home” as an expansive spatial phenomenon]

*“The dwelling is humanity's most frequent and fundamental act of building and, by extension, in some respects the architect's most influential area of activity.” -Roderick Kemsley/Christopher Platt*

## [Selected Excerpts from Field Notes]

*\*F. in Copenhagen, when giving us recommendations of places to go in the city, used the word “cozy” several times to refer to different neighborhoods or streets that were “good places to stroll” or “hang out in”*

*\*J. from Argentina - restaurant owner - living in Denmark for 20 years - he originally moved to Denmark for a girl - they broke up - he ended up staying permanently - he seems to have happily adopted Danish traditions - his restaurant seems to have been decorated/arranged for hygge and when I point this out he seems to feel pride (“We are masters of it here.”) - he spoke about the importance of “relaxing” at the holidays*

*\*T. : “Danes have their childhood friends and their family and that’s enough. Most Danes do not seek out new social connections as they get older. In Danish culture it can be difficult to make new friends. It is increasingly difficult the older you get. Danes generally have a handful of relationships/friendships that are cultivated from childhood... Danes do not look for a large number of relationships..*

*\*T.’s emphasis on New Year’s Eve planning and traditions [special New Year’s Eve version of hygge - usually involving specific plans]*

*\*M.’s advice to “leave it open - each person will say hygge is something different - it is slippery”*

*\*M. emphasized atmosphere, ambiance, solitude*

*\*M. : “It’s so vague, but it’s also very fixed. It’s a difficult concept. Even though everyone know’s when it is not there. It’s very slippery.”*

*\*M. : “You cannot point it out. You can sense that it is there, but cannot exactly say “Oh there it is” - or you cannot orchestrate it... Hygge is a kind of atmosphere. It’s not a thing - but the problem is that it’s also a thing.”*

*\*P. and M., sisters - their mother would bring them a “Donald Duck magazine” and “some candy” every time they were sick growing up - this is hygge / P., now married, does the same for her husband when he is sick - “though it is not familiar to him and so is not hygge, or at least not in the same way.” “He has a different meaning attached to it. But now we will share this family tradition.” / (at least, it is not yet hygge for P.’s husband - it may become a hyggelig experience for him once the tradition/ritual has been established in his adult, married life)*







*\*When P. celebrated Christmas with her husband's family for the first time, she had difficulty feeling hyggelig - she brought her iPad with her so she could watch the "Disney Christmas cartoon" that she grew up watching at Christmas - t" We his helped her to activate a sense of hygge*

*\*P.: "Ask any Danish girl about her first Christmas away from her family with her husband's family - it's a very big deal."*

*\*M.'s story about her childhood friend and their shared ritual of "eating gross white bread with sweet spreads together" - this was hygge. They no longer do this but they can talk about and reminisce about it together to create hygge.*

*\*M. : "a walk can be hygge, but a run cannot be"*

*\*P.: "My husband has always gone on long walks to find calm. This was never my thing - but now I do it with him and am starting to find it hyggelig."*

*\*M. : "Those American TV shows - House Hunters, Extreme Home Makeover - all these houses that look the same - that are "cookie cutter" - this is not something Danes would strive for" (meaning these homes appear distinctly not-hyggelig to Danes)*

*\*P. : "Hygge is something we strive for as a group, or collective." ... "We will talk openly about a situation or setting that is not hyggelig."*

*\*M. : "It [hygge] could be a text message from home."*

*\*M. : "I called a bag hyggelig earlier today because it was soft and I liked touching it."*

*\*P. : "Sam's Bar [Cheer's] TV show - "where everyone knows your name" - "this is a good way to describe hygge"*

*\*P. : "My friend who lives in Copenhagen - she's a bit hippy-ish - I went to visit her home and she had this purple couch that was very "her" - this was hygge."*

*\*M.'s story about their "blank" apartment and how she cut stars out of paper to hang up and make the space feel more like "her"*

*\*L. + B. met while cross-country skiing in Norway - this is a yearly tradition for them.*



Hjerting Kirke, Alan Havsteen-Mikkelsen \_ Hjerting

*L. + B. told the story of the farmhouse's original owners' daughter coming back to visit her childhood home and looking for her room. Other descendants and relatives of the original owners/builders have called or visited...*

*\*T. left to get groceries and left several candles burning, including the candles on an Advent wreath. We were in the bedroom when we smelled what seemed to be burning plastic. I went to the dining room and found that the coated? boughs of the Advent wreath had ignited. I extinguished it. When T. returned I told him what had happened, but he did not seem too concerned about the potential danger.*

*\*guy in bookstore: half-Ecuadorian, half-Danish - spoke of the difficulty of the language, Danish "racism," the popularity of Daffy Duck (his theory that he is second fiddle to Mickey Mouse - an underdog - and so Danes root for him, or relate to him) - joked? about the danger of so many dimly lit spaces in Denmark ("My roommate is always saying his room is too bright - he's made uncomfortable by bright light.") - spoke about Hans Christian Andersen's writing as "dark, sad 'comedies' and the relation to the "weirdness" of Danish film and popular culture*

*\*T. : "The grandchildren will come to visit in the morning - they will come and lie in bed with us and talk and watch cartoons - this is hygge - playing games with them - in a way, trying to be a kid again..."*

*\*E. makes quilts. For her, the work involved is a calming, hyggelig experience - the selecting of materials, the planning of the pattern, the slow and repetitive sewing. These are activities that she often does alone - but the sharing of the quilts (she makes them for many people, often for newborns) is a very hyggelig experience. (E. : "Knitting and quilting are hyggelig activities - using my hands - being creative - spending hours planning and calculating a design - remembering where different pieces of fabric came from - who gave them to you - or why each piece is significant.")*

*\*T. "It's hygge when I can see her and know she is very involved with figuring out a quilt."*

*\*T. "I can also have hygge watching a soccer game by myself, drinking coffee."*

*\*T. makes his own aquavit - E. will often accompany him when he is foraging ingredients and this is a form of hygge for them.*

*\*For T., preparing dinner is often a kind of hygge*

## Reading List

A list of the things I've read and referenced and those that I plan to read and reference as I continue work on this project:

**Gaston Bachelard** : *Poetics of Space / The Flame of a Candle / The Psychoanalysis of Fire / The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*

**Peter Sloterdijk** : *Bubbles: Spheres Volume 1: Microspherology*

**Tim Ingold** : *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*

**Peter Block** : *Community: The Structure of Belonging*

**Mikkel Bille** : *Hazy worlds. Atmospheric ontologies in Denmark / Staging Atmospheres: Materiality, Culture, and the texture of the in-between / Lighting up cosy atmospheres in Denmark / An Anthropology of Luminosity*

**Jeppe Trolle Linnet** : *Money can't buy me hygge: Danish middle-class consumption, egalitarianism and the sanctity of inner space / Dwelling in the cozy café*

**Judith Friedman Hansen** : *The Proxemics of Danish Daily Life*

**Jonathan Bean** : *Cozying Up: Designing Objects with Hygge in Mind*

**Michael Booth** : *The Almost Nearly Perfect People*

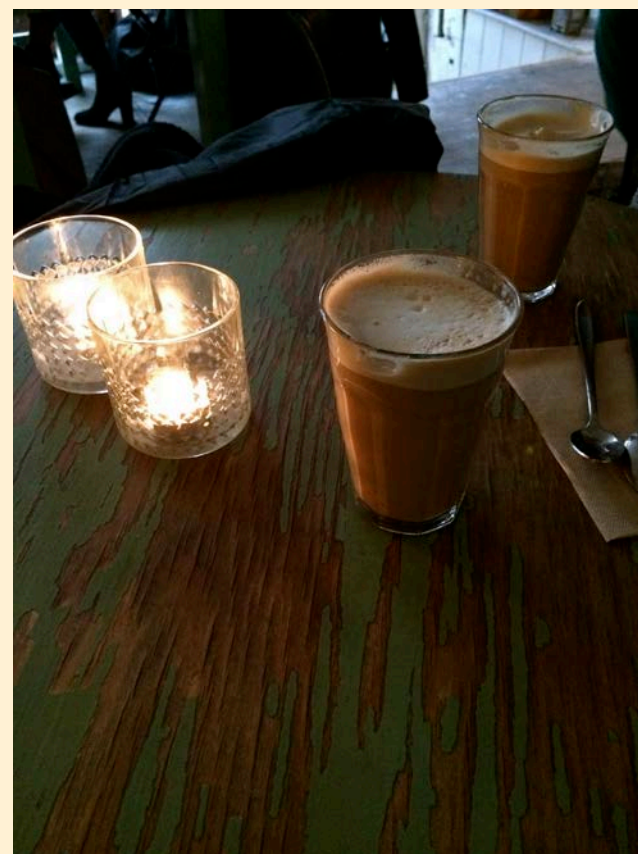
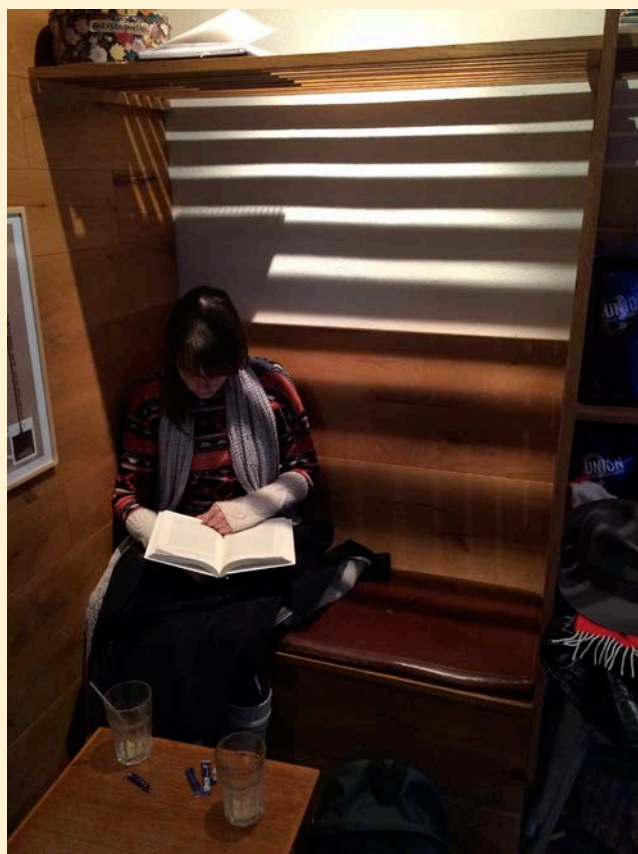
**Jan Gehl** : *How to Study Public Life / Cities for People / Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*

**Charles Montgomery** : *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*

**Juhani Pallasmaa** : *Identity, Intimacy and Domicile: Notes on the phenomenology of home / Hapticity and Time*

**Michael Pollan** : *A Place of My Own*

**Alain de Botton** : *The Architecture of Happiness*







*Your Rainbow Panorama, Olafur Eliasson \_ Aarhus*

**Martin Heidegger** : *Poetry, Language, Thought*

**William H. Whyte** : *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*

**Langdon Elsbree** : *The Rituals of Life: Patterns in Narratives*

**Kemsley and Platt** : *Dwelling with Architecture*

**Christian Norberg-Schulz** : *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*

**Edward T. Hall** : *The Silent Language / The Hidden Dimension / The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time*

**Bernard Rudofsky** : *The Prodigious Builders: Notes Toward a Natural History of Architecture / Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*

**Jane Jacobs** : *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

**Peter Zumthor** : *Atmospheres*

**Steen Eiler Rasmussen** : *Experiencing Architecture*

**Christopher Alexander** : *The Timeless Way of Building / A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction / The Nature of Order*

**Roland Barthes** : *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*

**Witold Rybczynski** : *Home: A Short History of an Idea*

**Richard Sennett** : *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*

**Sherry Turkle** : *Evocative Objects*

**Henry Glassie** : *Vernacular Architecture*

**Marianne Gullestad** : *Kitchen-Table Society*

**Margaret J. Wheatley** : *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*

**Elizabeth Shove** : *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and how it Changes*

**Barbara L. Fredrickson** : *Love 2.0: Creating Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection*



[All images by James Wilson]

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