The Historical Building's Being in Life and Death

(Den historiske bygnings væren på liv og død)

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This article deals with the concept 'historical architecture' as 'living architecture'. By 'living architecture' I mean architecture, which can, metaphorically, be seen as a sort of creature which is born, lives and dies. This innovative inspiration opens up an additional and more varied understanding and evaluation of a building's characteristics. This also entails the development of more relevant and precise methods for handling the building and its continued existence: procedures that respect the building's own eventful narrative accumulated in its body through a long historical process.

'Historical' architecture

The idea takes as its starting point the commonly applied adjective 'historical' - a term most of us use without reflecting on it. In our everyday use of the word, there is an implicit understanding that the building is old, and that it has special value because of its age, style or decorations, or perhaps a famous person used to live in it, or it was once the setting of a particular event. Common to all these grounds is that the building is fixed to a certain situation or limited time span as documentation for its conservation value. The building's history is thereby identified with a specific time; in other words, one thereby disregards the fact that history and thus the term 'historical' is precisely connected to a continuous time where buildings 'lead' a historical life, which I here allow myself to compare metaphorically to a kind of living creature, such as, for instance, man. Before elaborating on this, we are going to do a small exercise:

Let us evoke two vitally different but true 'historical creatures': Karen Blixen and Koldinghus, and ask the questions: who/what is Karen Blixen? And who/what is Koldinghus?

The answer is that Karen Blixen is both the 17-year-old Karen Dinesen and the 77-year-old Karen Blixen-Finecke, including all the other Karens in between. Similarly, Koldinghus is both the remains of a gothic castle from the 1400s, Christian III's and Christian IV's two renaissance castle variants from the 1500s and 1600s, Frederick IV's baroque castle from the 1700s and the ruin of it from the 1800s, and, finally, the building we have today from the 1900s. It is unlikely anyone will insist on identifying Karen Blixen and Koldinghus solely on the basis of their 'original beings': as they were at the time of their genesis, when they were born/created. Likewise, it is unlikely anyone would

imagine Karen Blixen restored back to her 17-year-old shape but with the characteristics and the personality she developed throughout her whole life.

To the left: author Karen Blixen. An eventful life has characterized this face. Photo: Peter Beard, 1962. The Karen Blixen Museum.
To the right: Koldinghus. Part of the eastern facade. Facades and masonry are great testimony to the castle's life and story.

They both lived historical lives: lives which have, moreover, been eventful and exciting and have benefitted us as well. So they 'lived' a life. Some might say that Karen Blixen lived a real, i.e. biological, life and that this does not apply to Koldinghus, which only 'existed'. Of course this is true but the difference may not be so great. To live implies observations, changes, development. Existence itself can be arranged in a respirator. Or, when it comes to, for instance, biological eggs and sperm cells, existence can be maintained in a frozen state, in which case it is controlled, constant and dull: just as several listed and restored 'historical' buildings today appear 'frozen', out of step with contemporary life.

I took the liberty of comparing Koldinghus to Karen Blixen because they are both historical 'beings' which I have experienced and which I am still much preoccupied with. Both were significantly marked by life: in Koldinghus' case by its users, which were regents, courts and soldiers. Karen Blixen by the places she lived: Africa and Rungstedlund. Both Koldinghus and Blixen carried the beautiful historical attrition and wrinkles of their ages.

One does not get around the fact that, in such cases, people and buildings have influenced each other greatly throughout their lives; to such a degree actually that one might talk of a symbiotic coexistence. And the historical building could thereby, in its life story, be compared to a living creature. This relation characterises basically every building which is still historically authentic. On this basis the following thesis can be put forward:

Buildings are like living beings. They are born, fall ill, recover, grow old and die. From the freshness of youth through the maturing of life they achieve that special beauty that comes with age. So the building's historical identity is not merely that which was given to them at 'birth' by the architects, artists and craftsmen who made them, it is also created by the subsequent influences of life, by changes and additions. If the building has had an eventful life, it can thus be a serious matter to check the historical life process and to change or erase the imprints of human activity left on it through its long life. The common urge of wanting to transform a building back to its original state at the time of its 'birth' is one of the greatest problems in the field of building restoration. This is, in any event, an issue every restorer has to deal with.[1]

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Opposite approaches to preservation

Keeping the 'historical life' in mind as a supplementary criterion for a 'historical building', two different attitudes to the preservation of buildings must be mentioned briefly. These emerged in connection with the great interest in historical architecture which arose in Europe in the last half of the 1800s. These differences still impact on the work of building restoration.

The first attitude, *maximalism*, entailing comprehensive procedures and reversion, had its origin in France, strongly advanced by the architect E.E.Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879). In the field of restoration, he is often quoted for the sentence: "To restore a building is not to maintain, repair or rebuild it. It is to re-establish it in a complete form which may never have existed before."[2] Viollet-le-Duc made stylistic restorations of many of the greatest and most famous monuments in France.

Similar extensive restorations were developed in other European countries as well. In England J.G. Scott (1811-1878) was dominant within the field with more than 800 church restorations and countless other historical buildings and facilities. In Sweden Helgo Zettervall (1831-1907) was the great restoration architect. In Denmark N.L. Hoyen (1798-1870) was the art historian who, along with the architects N.S. Nebelong (1806-1871) and H.B. Storck (1839·1922), were responsible for these unfortunate reversions. I call them unfortunate because the procedures erased the vestiges of the building's historical life and with it its historical *authenticity* (credibility) and *narrativity* (narrative ability). Noted Danish examples are Viborg Cathedral and Bjernede Round Church. It is not less regrettable that in all countries the 'victims' were primarily the greatest and most distinguished buildings.

The other attitude, *minimalism*, entailing gentle procedures and protective processing, arose as a backlash, led by the writer John Ruskin (1819·1900) and the architect William Morris (1834-1896).

The Norwegian Director General Stephan Tschudi-Madsen provides an excellent description of the two opposite approaches in his book with the indicative title *Restoration and Anti-Restoration* (1976). Among other things he refers to the following vivid quote: "That (restoration) is tantamount to the most complete destruction a building can be subjected to.."[3] And a quote by Morris regarding St. Albans Cathedral: "They are now threatening to tear the hearts out of these merciful fragments by restoration."[4]

In 1982 the internationally noted English professor and specialist architect Bernard M. Feilden presented his extensive work *Conservation of Historic Buildings*[5], in which he detailed and carefully suggested quite different gentle instructions and methods within the field.

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Château Pierrefonds as a ruin in 1855 III. From Viollet-le-Duc's *Restoration* p. 50.
Château Pierrefonds after restoration by Viollet-le-Duc: 1870. Ibid p. 51.

In the middle of the 1900s, Scandinavia was still influenced by the severe stylistic restorations. But certain architects were critical. In the article "Restoration" (1938), Danish professor Mogens Koch ironically points out the paradox of the newly restored Ørnetæppe in Sankt Knud Church: "It is a great success: it is impossible to see that it has been lying in the coffin since 1106"[6]. An important contribution in this connection comes in the shape of Finnish Dr. Jukka Jukilehtos's dissertation *History of Architectural Conservation* (1986) and the following quote:

"The theory of preservation/restoration should not be mistaken for a static, stagnant awe-inspiring conception of a building, but rather be viewed as a dynamic and critical process with studies and estimations which take into account the historical details in each building's historical parts, its cultural values, its special relation to its own historical life story and its living conditions in relation to the social and economic connection of the time"[7].

The situation in Denmark today

In the pamphlet *Danish Building Restoration History – an Introduction* (1983) Master of Arts Michael Ottosen describes the obscure situation in Denmark characterized by different principles: *the maximization principle*, *the equivalence principle*, *the status quo-principle*, *the minimization principle*, *romantic restoration*, *historical-scientific restoration*, *architectural-artistic restoration*, *aesthetic-critical restoration*[8]. As the words imply, there are many different attitudes with the maximization principle and the minimization principle at each extreme of the spectrum. Characteristic for many of the attitudes is that they are based more or less on subjective ideas. The only common objective criterion is in the term 'historical', which ought to be viewed as a process in which the building becomes historical over time, and the status quo situation for restoration is assimilated into the building's future existence which is conditioned by its continued use. It is this basic problematic Denmark is dealing with today, though it was actually introduced in Venice fifty years ago.

As a Danish counterpart to Viollet-le-Duc's Château Pierrefonds, we can take a look at the rebuilding of Koldinghus 1972-1992 where the status quo principle and the reversibility method formed the basis of the rebuilding of the east and west wing.

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Incidentally, Koldinghus also displays examples of other architects' restorations, for instance, Architect Viggo Norn's use of concrete for spiral staircases and ceilings which are not reversible. Norn's maximalistic rebuild of the gigantic turret is unmistakably based on reconstruction.

To the left: Koldinghus ruin, seen from the south-east.
To the right: the rebuilt south and east wing of Koldinghus, 1972-1992.

The Venice charter

In 1964 I attended an international conference on restoration in Venice. It concluded with a famous charter[9], the content of which clearly distances itself from the previous hundred years' restorations characterised by extensive reversions and doubtful reconstructions. The following quotes can serve as examples:

From article 11: Additions of value – from any epoch – to a historical building should be respected, given that unity in terms of style is not to be striven for under a restoration.

From article 5: The preservation of historical monuments is often easier when these are used for societally useful purposes.

From article 9: Restoration is a procedure which should be characterized by the fact that it is only used as an exception.

Medieval churches

It is an interesting fact that buildings live longer than humans. Some even much longer, as, for instance, our churches from the medieval period, which last 800-900 years and are still functioning and being used as intended. Undoubtedly, these buildings, which I am tempted to compare with living creatures, would be able to tell of many interesting things and events if they could speak. And, actually, they do speak, in their own way. If you know their alphabet and language, which can be learned, you can read about their long lives end events through their masonry, inches and fixtures. The same applies to other later buildings.

In Denmark we have roughly 2000 excellent examples of this vital historical process. Our eldest churches were created in the first 3-400 years of the Middle Ages, but during the subsequent 6-700 years, they were repeatedly changed, rebuilt, subjected to small and large adjustments and additions, modified to match the changing liturgical displays, the architectural changes in style and new fixtures and artistic ornamentations. And it is precisely because of all these renewals the churches survived till today. No other buildings are anywhere near equal to them: to this day they

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possess a varied degree of *original substance*; they radiate great *authenticity*; they have presented even very changeable *identities*, and they possess highly interesting *narrativities*.

Church of Maria Magdalene: an example of a building's long life from medieval times to today. The different parts of the church's as well as its fixtures are from different historical periods, each representing its own phase of reuse. This way the church has been able to fulfil its purpose through 900 years until today. Photo: 1968.

The four keys

I chose to term the above-mentioned concepts *keys* because they can help open up a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the character of a historical building. The keys are objective and they sharpen the understanding of the concrete, which the building itself indicates, as opposed to merely what the viewer *thinks* is historical. If we placed an architect, an archaeologist, a historian, a politician, a tourist, a priest and a public servant from The Heritage Agency of Denmark in front of the same church they would be looking at the same building but they would not perceive it the same way: they would not *see* it the same way. They might not feel the need to observe it more closely but merely settle for *thinking*.

Furthermore, the keys appeal to a greater understanding, contemplation and respect. It would, for instance, be irreversible to remove the building's *original substance*, and it might be catastrophic for the building's genuineness. Similarly, destroying the *authenticity* would create uncertainty about the building as a historical being. And to preclude the *narrativity* would destroy the whole experience.

I have mentioned these keys in earlier works[10] but as they have sometimes been misinterpreted or confused I shall clarify them here.

1. *Originality (origin) is defined as the degree of genuineness the building possesses at a given time in its process, evaluated in proportion to its state of genesis, i.e. its time of creation; the only point at which it was 100 percent original.*

Originality is exclusively restricted to the substance, i.e. the materials the building consisted of when it was created. This original substance is always in situ (in its original place). The original substance in situ is the only thing that can document the original building's continued presence and origin. If it has been moved, it does not attest to originality; neither does it if moved back or replaced with a reproduction. The original substance's proportion and quantity will inevitably decrease over time, due to usage, attrition, maintenance, restoration, etc. Therefore it is important to preserve this substance optimally to secure the building's originality and authenticity.

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Later additions or reconstructions that are architecturally relevant all possess their own original substance.

To the left: Nørretorv 11, Hjørring. Listed building, built in 1854 as a home for two families. Here the house appears as it was in 1972, 100 percent original in exterior and interior.

To the right: Nørretorv 11. Here as a new-built reproduction after the demolition of the before-mentioned house, the condition of which was found to be too poor to retain. This house appears unoriginal and without authenticity. Paradoxically, the listing has been maintained: one might be tempted to ask if the listing applies to the original old house, which no longer exists, or to the new, unoriginal one? Photo: Ole Brøndum, 2005

2. Authenticity (credibility) is defined as the genuineness and credibility with which the building presents itself, and which appears from its structures, details and surfaces, all of which document each other in a long connected continuity and in this way logically narrates and acknowledges the building's history and continual process.

Authenticity particularly deals with a building's visible architectural parts, details, surfaces, building-archaeological traces, etc. Therefore we should take care to not simply remove 'historical wear', worn stone floorings, plaster surfaces, the patinated surfaces and colour shades of tile facades and tile roofs, the patination of metals, the structure of several old layers of paint, etc. Such details are, not least because of their mutual relation, significant to the perception of, and belief in, the building's age and historical value. Old buildings can end up being restored so perfectly that one would never think they were old but rather reconstructions.

To the left: in 1989 Holmen's Church in Copenhagen still presented interesting poetically worn down facades, which in the most beautiful way endowed the building with a historical authenticity confirmed by the patina of time, weathered attrition and necessary repairs.

To the right: in 1989 Holmen's Church was given a new surface treatment, which was supposed to return the church to its original renaissance character. The facades' surfaces, which had until then been rich and historical, were now covered with an artificial painting in a stiff pattern and dull colour scheme. Like the wallpaper in a doll's house, it spreads over the entire building and robs it of its historical appearance as old, wise and dignified. Photo: Mogens Hansen.

3. Identity (appearance) is defined as the appearance and personal character which the building has acquired at a certain time in its historical process, and which it now exudes.

A building always has an identity. A historical building that is very old will most likely have changed identity several times, for instance due to new owners, changes in the use of the building, or other

events. The identity may continue to change, not least when exposed to new and substantially different kinds of reuse, which have implicitly been a condition for the building's very survival.

Identity is the architect's great responsibility and it is unavoidable, regardless whether he tries to be anonymous or if he steps forward with new additions. This is also an area in which influential politicians, council members, arbiters of taste and many other people offer their opinion - for better or worse. They do not usually concern themselves particularly with the important aspect of originality, though.

To the left: Højgade 3, Haderslev. The building , which has had three distinct identities, is here shown in its second identity. Originally it was built in 1795 as a half-timbered house. In the middle of the 1800s, it was changed into a late-classicist building with beautiful characteristic details and two interesting cast iron barred display windows. The pretty façade's slight lines were elegantly adjusted to the underlying timber framing. Photo: 1973.

To the right: Højgade 3. In 1976 the house got its third identity. The classicistic façade had to give way to a plain and dull reconstruction of the original half-timber building, where only a few original parts were kept intact. With this the city lost an interesting documentation of a historical period of growth. Photo: 1976.

4. Narrativity (narrative value) is defined as the narrative ability a building possesses and has acquired through its life and which finds expression in preserved historical wholes, parts of buildings, building archaeological traces, details and remains from earlier periods and events. The building itself is the most direct and original source of the building's history.

Narrativity could also be explained as the building's narrative value or legibility: the story told by the building itself, or which can be read by looking at it. As such, narrativity is based on the same parts of buildings and details as authenticity. The terminology, in which the building becomes the "narrator" or the "book", activates the reader into working actively with the work, thereby engaging him/her in the historic building's life and being.

Evaluation after intervention

The quality of a restoration or another similar intervention of preservation can be tested by checking every single 'key' after the work is finished. One will then get an idea how much of the original historical content has been lost. Has the *original substance* been reduced? If so, where and how much? Has the *authenticity* been diminished? If so, how and to what extent? Has the *narrativity* been weakened? Is the building telling the same story as before? The *identity* can

hardly completely avoid changes when surfaces and visible parts of the building are processed, and it is also influenced by new additions.

Koldinghus, part of the south-west corner. Different types of masonry tell us about influences from the gothic, the renaissance, the baroque and the present time. The granite ashlar comes from demolished Romance villages, here reused as a basement under the two new wings commissioned by reformation king Christian III. Koldinghus possesses great narrative value today. Photo: 1994.

Sønderborg Castle, part of the south-facing façade. The masonry has been completely cleaned off and the joints have been redone. Centuries of narrative value has been permanently erased. Historically, Sønderborg Castle and Koldinghus have had a lot in common: the same architectural periods; the same royal users; the same extensive devastations of war, and, in recent times, the same comprehensive, though very different, restorations. Sønderborg Castle was treated based on the principle of maximalism (Architect: Peter Koch); Koldinghus was based on status quo minimalism with reversible additions. (Inger and Johannes Exner. Photo: 1974.

Reversibility - a useful concept

As is evident from the previous chapters, the subject area is fraught with significant discrepancies and ambiguities. This, of course, affects the attitudes and results of people who work with the subject. Some display great certainty, others feel more insecure, I confess to be among the latter. However, inability to act can also be problematic - particularly so when a building's survival is at stake. This is where the concept of reversibility enters the picture as a way of characterising certain gentle interventions.

Reversibility refers to the physical form of an intervention, which means that it is possible to later undo the intervention without damaging the building, which subsequently appears just as intact as prior to the procedure.

Reversible Interventions have multiple advantages. They affect a historic building as little as possible physically, remove the least amount of original substance and make it easier to distinguish between old and new. They can be defined in terms of extent and economy, and they are architecturally challenging.

Interventions and terminology

Just as a doctor examines his patient while taking into consideration his or her age and previous life, makes a diagnosis, and proposes a treatment aimed at the patient's future, the treatment of a building should also be formulated with precision based on the professional insight into the building's life so far and the life it should preferably have in the future of the one who ‘treats’ the building. Here the ‘keys’ can help clarify and specify the factors that are part of the complex, perhaps uncertain or subjective basis available for projects and decisions before deciding on the appropriate intervention.

To the left: Koldinghus as an uncovered ruin. Photo from 1972

To the right: Koldinghus. Covering and protection carried out as a reversible structure that leaves the ruin untouched and intact. Photo from 1993

Since there is a relationship between the nature of the defect and the category of the treatment, it is important to formulate interventions so they are precise and comprehensible. Unfortunately, we today have to ask ourselves whether we in Denmark, and in our professional community with countries outside Denmark, refer to the same thing when we talk about 'historical architecture and its preservation, restoration, renovation, consolidation, conversion, etc.? In Denmark, the Danish term restoration is seen as an academic, overall discipline that comprises a mix of examinations, craftsmanship, building technology, conservation, etc. used for submitting a historical building to major refurbishments that more or less deliberately aim at reverting the building to its original shape.

It is remarkable that the Danish main discipline 'restaurering' is in England not called 'restoration' but 'conservation', which includes several different kinds of interventions, including restoration. Bernard M. Feilden lists seven different types of interventions that occur in connection with the various conditions of buildings and the corresponding treatments.[11] The interventions are subsequently listed according to the order of scale of Feilden, starting with the most moderate interventions and ending with the most forceful. The concepts are included in the curve of decay. The list uses English terms, followed by Danish:

Conservation:	Building care:	involves:
1. Prevention	Forebyggelse	advance protection
2. Preservation	Beskyttelse	repairs
3. Consolidation	Konsolidering	securing structure and substance
4. Restoration	Restaurering	bringing back to its original shape
5. Rehabilitation	Rehabilitering	rehabilitation, re-establishing
6. Reproduction	Genfremstilling	placing a copy
7. Reconstruction	Rekonstruktion	making an exact copy

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the English word restoration is here a subordinate intervention under the more general conservation, which corresponds to Baupflege in Germany, restauration, in France, and restauro, in Italy. In Sweden they use the term byggnadsvård, in Norway miljøvern. In Denmark we might appropriately call it bygningspleje (building care). But the best solution

would be to come up with an international terminology that unambiguously and accurately refers to what you are discussing. In the professional world of medicine there is no room for doubt. Regardless of the country, people know, for instance, that dialysis is a type of kidney treatment. The medical terms are international, Greek and Latin. A similar unambiguous terminology ought to be created for the subject area dealt with here, which is commonly and inaccurately called 'restaurering', an expression which should only be considered one of several interventions.

In practice, different interventions can be included in the same building care project. E.g. rehabilitating or restoring a roof structure, restoring a doorway, reconstructing a staircase, maintaining a facade. This applies to large as well as small projects, see the section on whole/detail.

The process: genesis - life -decay

Just as human life is a process that begins with birth and ends with death, the existence of buildings is also a process in which genesis, life and death cannot be separated, but are preconditions for each other. The building is affected by this kind of process which may often last more than a century. It is only 100 percent original at genesis. Immediately thereafter decay starts to set in: at first, visibly in the form of patina; later as wear, which can be remedied by maintenance. Many buildings exist at this stage, a stage where they can remain for a long time if no serious damages occur, such as, for instance, dry rot, which requires repairs, where some parts have to be replaced completely. New residents may want to make changes: kitchens are remodelled, bathrooms modernised. These and other major interventions, including more open and bright spaces, roof, window, and facade insulation, may influence the building's colour scheme and materials in such a way that the building's identity is affected.

If, over time, the building has become functionally outdated, non-functional, and subject to strong attrition which makes it impossible to rehabilitate or reuse the building, decay lies ahead. If a building is empty and unused, roofs and windows soon start leaking, moisture penetrates and the woodwork is badly attacked by rot and fungus. This situation is extremely critical and crucial to the survival of the building's original substance. If this is not remedied, which often involves the reproduction of important building elements, the decay will result in the collapse of roofs and floors. Following this, the building quickly proceeds to 'the ruin stage', which soon becomes a static condition where only inorganic parts, masonry and foundations remain.

No buildings can avoid being influenced. They all exist somewhere between genesis and annihilation. This can be illustrated graphically with a curve that begins at the time of genesis, at which time the building is untouched and 100 percent original. The building is subsequently worn down and ages, which unfortunately reduces the original substance and affects its identity. It is consequently important that the originality, authenticity and narrativity remain optimal to allow the physical process to be experienced as a confirmation of each building's historical 'being'.

(graph)

Johannes Exner: The building's curve of decay. Theoretical illustration of the life of a building from genesis to death. The original substance in relation to the deterioration of the object (listed at the bottom) with the related interventions (listed at the top). Each building has an individual progression and curve. The current

position of the buildings described later in the article are indicated by: A: palace, Amalienborg – B: villa, Aarhus - C: country house, Thy - D: consoles. Rundetårn.

In the course of history, violent decay sometimes results from natural disasters, wars and fires - all of which result in instant extermination. The otherwise soft continuous curve then suddenly, at a random place, drops vertically towards 0 substance. Two recent examples of such sudden destructions of gigantic dimensions are the terrorist attack on World Trade Center, New York, on 11 September 2001, and the tsunami in the sea between Sumatra and Ceylon on 26 December 2004.

Compared with this kind of sudden and very visible destruction, you should understand that similar processes affect most buildings, only imperceptibly, over long periods of time. In these successive interventions it cannot be avoided that the building's original substance is affected and reduced. If this development continues, one day the building will have been completely renewed, and will thus have lost its originality.

Whole/detail

A building is a whole made up of details. You could make a rhyme based on this: the whitewash is a detail of the plaster - the plaster is a detail of the façade - the façade of the building - the building of the street - the street of the block - the block of the city - the city of the landscape - the landscape of the country. That is to say, the same element is both whole and detail, depending on whether you look at it top-down or bottom-up.

The whole/detail relationship creates complexities which are structurally based on the physical interconnectedness of the whole and the detail. You focus on the details keeping in mind the whole, and you focus on the whole keeping in mind the details. In any built-up area one may discover small details and large wholes, which taken together strengthen the understanding of the progress of history and thus the architectural culture of the place and the country. This applies to all types of buildings, distinguished as well as simple, in the city as well as in the countryside.

Consequently there is - even if you do not immediately see it - a connection between the ‘being’ of historic buildings in Copenhagen, Eastern Jutland and Western Jutland, in spite of major differences in architecture and landscapes. Furthermore, the experience and understanding of precisely this relationship with its differences within a shared national culture and history contributes to making the way they are experienced individually particularly great. Today, you can travel from one place in Denmark to another in only a few hours. You can travel from the vibrant cityscapes of Øresund and Eastern Jutland to the quiet dune heaths and plantations of Western Jutland in only a few hours’ time - just as it has become almost too easy to travel from the northern Europe to Southern Europe and experience completely different contexts and differences.

The 'being' of three different buildings

Keeping in mind the ‘keys’, I will, to provide an example, describe a few historical characteristics of three different buildings, all of which are dwellings: an aristocratic mansion, an upper-middle-class villa and a simple house in the country, where the adjective 'historical' is strongly linked to their historical being.

A palace from the 1700s. Amalienborg Palace, Copenhagen

The octagonal space with the four Rococo palaces constitutes world-class architecture. The appearance of the complex might lead you to think it was the result of the efforts of one single person, Court Architect Niels Eigtved (1701-1754), who also created Frederiksstaden, the district in which the complex is located. Yet other architects were also involved in the process.

Following the fire at Christiansborg Palace, in 1795, the Royal Family purchased Amalienborg as a temporary residence. In order to have more space and improve internal connectivity, C.F. Harsdorff (1735 - 1799) built a closed connecting passage between the palaces of Moltke and Schack and bridging Amaliegade. This passage was designed as a 'modern' Classicist colonnade. For reasons of increased space requirements, the low intermediate buildings of the palaces were increased in height to two stories. This was eventually also implemented in the other palaces; the last was Brockdorff's Palace by Architect B. Magens, in 1801.

Today, the colonnade manifests itself distinctly and strongly, whereas the added stories are hardly perceived due to their adapted style. One also hardly notices how the identity of the space was hereby changed from airy elegance to more dense and closed. It is only Harsdorff's use of facing plaster instead of sandstone - which Eigtved used - that reveals to the keen observer that something has been done which blurs the originality and affects the identity.

Fredriksstaden seen from the cupola of Marmorkirken. Amalienborg Palace Square is bisected by two axes. Today, the east axis from Marmorkirken extends to the new opera house on the harbour - conveying the impression of a clear and rigid layout. Photo: 2004

Amalienborg looking towards Harsdorff's colonnade. The colonnade, by means of a built-in connecting corridor at the top, connects the palaces of Schack and Moltke. It is hardly discernible that the heightened intermediate buildings between the palaces and corner pavilions have given the Palace Square a more closed expression. Photo: 2004

When, today, Amalienborg to many people seems original and authentic, this is not justified by building archaeological reasons but is largely due to the symbiosis between the imposing architecture of the castle complex and its function as a residence for the Royal family through several generations. It is the story the site tells of the life of these families, including large family events, distinguished visitors, guard parades, thousands of tourists and ordinary people which lends Amalienborg its special atmosphere. This wealth of life reaches its climax when, on special occasions, the members of the royal family step onto the balcony at Moltkes Palæ to meet the people face to face.

Harsdorff's additions - motivated by function - to Eigtved's elegant composition, a palace building containing solitary residences for the nobility, have, due to their architecturally more compact form,

developed the square into a public urban space - a large popular cultic space for royal events. It is this 'being' with its perceptible narratives that presents the palaces as historical 'beings'.

Yet, today, this identity is affected by that fact that from Christiansborg Palace Square you can see the new opera's huge main façade bizarrely push its way forward behind the palaces of Brockdorff and Schack, closing the open space between them. Notwithstanding the fact that the Opera was constructed a considerable distance away on the other side of the harbour entrance. The impact of the surroundings is also part of the being of a historical building.

The historical process of Amalienborg is most likely noticed only by very few people, as it has occurred successively and undramatically. But that is precisely why it might be interesting to visualize the architectural difference between the Amalienborg of Eigtved and Harsdorff, to illustrate how Harsdorff's major intervention, which is not very well known, manifests itself today. For this reason I have here juxtaposed two photos of the same part of the complex taken from the Palace Square. One is a photo animation of Eigtved's Amalienborg 250 years ago. The other shows the same motif, but as it appears today. The difference in identity is striking.

Amalienborg Palace Square facing East. The New Opera seems to be located close behind the palaces. Together with Harsdorff's elevations it enhances the closed and more heavy identity of the complex. Photo: Peder Elgaard. 2004

Amalienborg Palace Square as it was created by Eigtved: an architecturally elegant, light and airy Rococo complex. Photo animation by Johannes Exner and Nina Ventzel Davidsen. 2005

An upper-middle-class villa, Aarhus

For the national exhibition in Aarhus, in 1909, Architect Egil Fischer (1878-1963) built a series of villas on a high-lying area near the city, the bay and woodland12. He located them to have the best possible views, so they would be of least possible nuisance to one another, and so they would conserve in the best possible way the old trees from the Marselisborg manor house. Only then did he lay down the site boundaries. It is interesting to witness the neighbourhood's qualities 100 years later. The green nature of the whole remains intact. The views have been reduced somewhat. But the buildings' exteriors and interiors are still characterised by the Baroque Revival traits of the period. Only two buildings have had extensions added - one several times.

This house is located on an L-shaped site, surrounded by the back gardens of six neighbouring houses and tall trees. Originally, the building was asymmetrical and had a bay like the neighbouring houses. But in 1919 the building was extended with an additional oriel 'tower', making it distinctively symmetrical. Since then the building has been extended three times. The last time was in 1939 when functionalist main stairs and a porch were added. All changes were made as additions. The building contains quite fine interiors with beautiful light effects. For the first 50 years the building was home to esteemed families. Later, it was converted into a private independent school and a houseshare for students. These uses combined with a lack of maintenance took such a toll on the house that it was approaching a state of decay. Today it has been restored and has since 1971 been used for residential purposes and for liberal professions.

Despite the many additions, the original substance has remained almost unchanged. The different additions and interventions are not immediately obvious, but can be observed on closer examination. The iron vitriol limewashing of the facades weathers beautifully. From below this layer, building archaeological traces and old repairs periodically appear and make the surfaces come alive. The building's original substance has been somewhat reduced. Its authenticity, however, remains. Its identity was changed drastically when the house was made symmetrical.

To the right: An upper middle-class villa in Aarhus created in several stages

Asymmetrical building with bay and a terrace

Eastward extension. Incorporating the terrace and adding a south-facing veranda, Architect W. Puck, 1909

Symmetrical extension with a west-facing bay. Architect Johannes Fredenksen, 1919

New Functionalism, main entrance, Architect E. Draiby, 1939

New kitchen, bath and balcony. Architects I. and J. Exner, 1971-2004

A simple country house in Thy

The house is a property which was owned by peasants/fishermen in Thy[13], a part of the country which was culturally highly developed in the bronze and middle ages. But the harsh climate and the close proximity of the sea made hard bedfellows. Violent sand-storms, heavy felling of trees and the use of lyme grass and marram grass as animal feed in the 1500s and 1600s laid waste large areas along Jutland's West Coast causing the population to move into the interior. In the 1700s the peasants returned to the sparsely arable fields between the ridges of dunes. Supplemented by fishing it was possible to sustain life by hard work and toil.

The house, which dates back to the 1800s, is a so-called ' krumsted' (an obsolete Danish word, literally: ‘a crooked place’). It lies only 600 metres from the beach, where in earlier times boats would fish from the open beach. In a major drowning accident in 1893, many fishermen lost their lives, including the man of the house in question. An enterprising son-in-law took over the duty to support the bereaved family and enlarged the property. When fishing became impossible due to changed coast and landing conditions, it became necessary to supplement the economy by working in the forest. The property changed owners and the building fell into disrepair; in 1964 it was sold as a holiday cottage. Shortly hereafter a storm toppled the west gable and a piece of the south-facing facade. The house was in strong decline, but has today been rehabilitated and its simple character has been preserved.

Together with other scattered houses the uncomplicated house makes up a detail in a many kilometres wide landscape of dunes, heathland and fields. Due to the unusually harsh surroundings and the low social status of the former residents, the house tells a dramatic life story that is different from the two previous examples. The struggle against storms, rain and salty air made necessary many replacements. For the roof: shaving, asphalt paper, concrete bricks, galvanised tiles, steel sheets. For the masonry: claystone, hand-moulded tile and machine-made brick. The house comprises three generations of windows, and the timber has been reused several times. Everything can be read. The narrativity is rich and the degree of authenticity high. The building's identity has varied somewhat, but has always had a touch of plainness and simplicity.

Comments to the three examples:

Despite the great differences of the three houses in terms of age, architecture, landscape, social status and life they are all valid historical ‘beings’. This shared trait results from all of them having gone through a process which has taken the shape of a long-standing symbiosis between man and environment. It is this implicit vital cooperation which is responsible for the buildings still 'being alive' today. The longer this symbiosis is active, the greater the possibility of the buildings to live on and become historical. In accordance with the whole-detail rule, they define themselves as well as each other in the narrative of their activities and large communities. Therefore it is important that originality, authenticity and narrativity remain optimal, so the physical process is experienced as a confirmation of each building's historical ‘being’.

To the right: The building ('krumstedet') seen from the south in 1964: the farmhouse is an extension of the stable and is sheltered from the wind by it. The barn is attached to the stable towards the north. The property is marked by heavy wear and decay and was consequently sold as a holiday home. Photo from 1964

Necessary repairs and renovations, including changing the roofing to replace concrete tiles with tarred galvanised tiles left its mark on the building's identity. Photo from 1965

During a Christmas storm in 1966, the west gable and the south-facing facade of the stable collapsed. After being restored, the masonry of the entire wing was disorderly in appearance. Photo from 1977

The harsh climate of the site, which included water pressured through the masonry and rapidly rusting roofing sheets, resulted, in 1988, in a new cladding of rustproof steel galvanised tiles on the roof and on particularly exposed parts of the facade. Photo from 2001

From being to death

Not only living buildings confirm the historical process. Ruins may also contain a narrative. At Trinitatis Kirkeplads, a church square in Copenhagen, several elongated stone fragments ‘stroll’ from Rundetårn diagonally across the square, down the ramp, through the colonnade and out towards Pilestræde 14 on heavy cast iron feet. The fragments consist of physically dead stone material, discarded cornice parts from the platform of Rundetårn, where they supported a finely wrought cast iron grille made by Christian IV's famous smith Caspar Fincke.

Decline had started to set in at the top of Rundetårn. The grille had to be repaired, the cornice consolidated, some corbels reproduced, others discarded. Everything had to be dismantled. On the square the corbels lay on lit de parade. Each 'individual subject' with its characteristic size, structure and markings: the oldest from the 1600s, the younger ones dating from repairs carried out in the 1700s and 1800s, the youngest had been added as spare parts in 1984. Today these corbels tell a story of historical beings on their way out of existence.

In Southern Europe many ruin fragments remain on the site. In this way, you can today and in the future experience the old corbels from Rundetårn at the church square. Here they provide seating, seating you can also crawl over, while recounting their long history. Today, they show that they still have a little function left, but also that they, like all other buildings and living beings, will at some time disappear.

Thus it is confirmed that death is also an important element of the existence of historical buildings, and that in its own fascinating way it can be a rich experience in the 'ruin phase'.

To the right: Discarded corbels 'stroll' across Trinitatis Kirkeplads - on their way out of existence.