• Paper / Proposal Title:
Dwellings and memory – an ethnography workshop at BA1 in Architecture

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• Abstract:
When designing dwellings as a student of architecture, it is common to refer to existing dwelling designs, built and unbuilt, in order to be able to ‘stand on the shoulders’ of the experiences gained by other architects. Relevant infrastructures of learning might e.g. consist of historical survey lectures, site visits of built dwellings or through modelling and drawing existing dwellings. Recording de-facto inhabitation of the dwellings studied might be included, with specific considerations in mind, e.g. the ‘subterritories’ for the particular inhabitants or the use of spaces compared to the architectural project’s scenario of inhabitation. Aspects concerning aging of the dwellings or, more generally, the course of time, might enter the analytical gaze through e.g. observations of inhabitants’ adaptations of the design, the recognizability of current or expired trends in popular culture or by wear-and-tear and patina present in the spaces.
However, the ways ‘memories are made’ in dwellings are often overseen. Thus motivations, aspects of inhabitants’ design activities as well as social continuities and trajectories get overlooked. In a week’s workshop for a group of undergraduate students of architecture, we tried to tackle this dilemma. We extended discussions of the workings of history by looking at ways in which memory is fabricated and administered by inhabitants using their dwellings and the furniture and things in these – as found in in-depth ethnographic studies. The students were then asked to find people who live in a
particular part of Copenhagen (where their project was set later) and to interview these in their homes, focusing on the ‘fabrication of memory’. Instead of a text-based evaluation of their research, the students were asked to use drawing and modelling for this purpose.

The suggested paper presentation would report on the concrete workings of this teaching experience, its results and possible extensions of post occupancy analysis gained.

• Author(s) Biography:

Robert Gassner studied Architecture and Fine Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, Denmark. At the latter, he is currently finalizing his phd thesis entitled ‘Inhabitation as a Conduit in Building Histories’. Robert has practiced as an architect for 10 years, mainly working with projects of refurbishing and remodeling existing dwellings and designing new dwellings. Both drawing on the experiences gained from architectural practice and studies of literature from predominantly architectural history and theory, as well as understandings of materiality and dwellings in the social sciences, he carried/s out field studies in early modern dwellings for his phd studies. In collaborations with artists and when curating film series for Copenhagen’s Architecture Film Festival, Robert has further extended his interests in inhabitants’ microcosms, in the way domestic interiors develop over time and interact with political and cultural histories. He is currently both teaching architectural history and theory as well as studio projects at the Royal Danish Academy.