

On the urban surface: historicizations of Haga, Sweden 1860–1985

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Re-evaluations of old urban built environments are often placed under the heading of gentrification, post-modern urbanism or urban renaissance, and as such, seen as only secondary effects of urban restructuring within post-industrial society. In this thesis, re-evaluations of old urban built environments are instead addressed as primary instances of the continual socio-spatial and imaginary co-construction of the city as a moral landscape. Spatial values and meanings are played out in asymmetrical power-relations and produce geographies in which “new” and “old” are intertwined with “nice” and “ugly”, “good” and “bad” in varying ways. Although under contestation and, hence, in a state of flux, such geographies tend to dominate over long periods of time. Thus, any examination of their construction and reshuffling needs to cover a long time-period in order to avoid precipitate conclusions regarding their nature and timing.

This thesis regards re-evaluation as a phenomenon of its own and as a possible constituent to any place, but examines re-evaluation in only one case – “Haga” in Göteborg, Sweden – a place with origins in the 17th century and with a dense predominately 19th century building stock, which on the level of public discourse has gone from being “old and ugly”, to being the “old and nice Haga.” The focus on re-evaluations of old urban built environments aims to reveal the specific ways in which discursive practices of history and geography are intertwined in different discursive contexts over time regarding Haga and old buildings. The aim is also to discern the discursive instances of re-evaluation, and to highlight the unavoidable subjectivity and politico-ideological aspects of spatio-temporal knowledge. Three tasks have been undertaken. First, an analytical focus is worked out in order to enable a framing of textual co-representations of space and time: historicization [“historisering”], a concept that concerns discursive linking of contemporary existing materiality to a past temporality (Chapter 1). Second, texts are gathered in which the objects of research – “Haga”, “old buildings”, and “good old Haga” – have been represented as a “place” (space + meaning). Departing from an analysis of the historicization of these texts, which range over

150 years, different domains and imaginary geographies are discerned. On the basis of this analysis, the texts are arranged into four empirical chapters, each of them making up a field of regularity [regelbundenhetsfält] of its own (Chapters 2-5). Third, the differences in the historicisations of each chapter are analysed in order to discern statements of contradiction. These contradictions, prevalent in every field of regularity, are sorted out as instances of ambivalence, i.e., embryos of re-evaluation, and in this case, the subsequent establishment of “old and nice Haga” (Chapters 2–5).

The headers of each empirical chapter define the result of the analysis of the field of regularity in question. Two of the objects of research – “Haga” and “old buildings” – are found to have been placed in the shadows of particular overarching conceptualisations: monumentality and the picturesque; the rural and the pre-industrial; “the welfare state” and nostalgia (Chapters 2-4). The third object of research – “old and nice Haga” – since being an object also of what in Foucauldian terminology can be defined as a discursive formation instead appears as itself (“old and nice Haga”) and with a bias in “the worker.” Each chapter is summarized in the following.

Chapter one introduces the issue, gives a brief survey of previous research and outlines the theoretical perspective. While much recent research regards both “space” and “history” as dependent on and interrelated to shifting power-relations and human subjectivity, these perspectives nevertheless are seldom brought together as an object for research. This study of the establishment of increased urban heritage concerns (as played out in the re-evaluation of “Haga” into “old and nice Haga”) needs to take a departure in the inter-dependence and co-construction of “history” and “space”. The main theoretical tools chosen are the concepts outlined by Foucault (1969) for an archaeology of knowledge (“enunciation,” “discourse,” “field of regularity,” “discursive formation,” “contradiction,” “rules of discursive formation”), together with what Gregory (1994) has called “geographical imaginations,” and, particularly in relationship to built environments, what Landzelius (1999, 2001), has called “semantic spaces” (subjectively conceptualised spatialities), “spatial polysemy” (ambiguous meanings) and “resemantisation” (continual semantic reshuffling). The thesis suggests “historicization” as an analytical tool for discerning discursive linkings of contemporary existing materiality to a past temporality. The source material for the thesis consists of every text that concerns the objects of research where they appear as places (space + meaning).

Chapter two, the first of four empirical chapters, examines the appearance of Haga and old buildings “in the shadow of monumentality and the picturesque,” and within what I define as a geography of urban attraction. The domain of urban attraction is delineated by the appearance of travel guides for Göteborg in the 1860s and by the historical context of an increased inter-urban mobility and a growing bourgeoisie. Research into Göteborg’s geography of urban attraction reveals this literature as a crucial instance for the canonization of the objects of attraction with an astounding permanence. This geography originated as buildings, places and routes of the late 19th century bourgeoisie urban life, coupled with an astonishing lack of the “old and nice” within the urban centre. The “old” is, in terms of “picturesque,” placed in the urban periphery. Moreover, research also reveals that later literature on Göteborg’s history constructs a geography which parallels the travel guides’ geography. Although Haga, in this context, is given a history up until the mid 19th century, its position is fixed in the margin through fateful con-fusions of name and space. Except for traces of a caponnière (reminiscent of the founding period) and bourgeoisie milieus, such as charity funded institutions on the outer edge, contemporary Haga remains largely absent in the geography of attraction, when it appears at all, it is “bad” as well as “ugly.” The contradictions identified (embryos of re-evaluation) consist of two instances of ambivalence. Even if these texts comprise the same imaginary geography, Haga here appears as a possible object for the geography of attraction.

Chapter three, the second of four empirical chapters, examines the appearance of Haga and old buildings “in the shadow of the rural and the pre-industrial,” which I define as a geography of memory. The domain, called the domain of the vernacular, is delineated by the appearance of “the dwelling-house” as the site of national identity at the time of the 1860’s increased quest for the unique (at the dawn of industrial mass-production) but also further on in time. Apart from a reiteration of the identical spatial relations of centre-periphery as discerned above (concerning Chapter two), the geography of memory plays out the geographical scale of “the region” with primary reference to rural pre-industrial circumstances. The research concerns the position of urban vernacular built environments in the context of local associations, particularly in the context of the Göteborg historical museum up until the museum’s 1967 investigation into objects of historical value situated within housing areas designated for clearance by the city (of which Haga was one). The 1967 investigation still conceptualised contemporary Haga in a fashion similar to the one discerned in the geography of attraction, in spite of the new programme from 1964 that emphasised the city’s process of industrialisation over the last hundred years. In relation to the geography of attraction, the geography of memory also includes charity funded dwelling houses of the foundation Dicksonska stiftelsen; Västra Skansgatan, a street with many “typical” wooden houses [landshövdingehus]; the entire street pattern of the area. These objects can thus be discerned as a partial historicization of Haga. The contradictions identified (embryos of re-evaluation) consist of several instances of ambivalence in the geography of memory. One contradiction found is intrinsic to the social construction of “the dwelling-house” as an object of regional folk-culture memory. One contradiction has its origins in the 20th century continual efforts to save not only individual buildings, but entire areas from exploitation. In the 1970s, these appear as efforts to decompose the pervasive opposition of “the old” and “the new” in spatial planning. One contradiction lies in the insistence on an extension of industrial memory’s objects (the factories) to the industrial era’s housing areas. One contradiction lies in a stress on the need to also preserve Haga’s atmosphere. One contradiction lies in the reconsideration of the museum’s task and a demand for more active participation in contemporary issues.

Chapter four, the third of four empirical chapters, examines the appearance of Haga and old buildings “in the shadow of ‘the welfare state’ and nostalgia,” and within what I define as a geography of sanitization. The domain, a domain of housing politics, is delineated by the appearance of public concerns in the mid 19th century to come to terms with a growing housing shortage in the wake of urbanization, and the successive transformation of such public concerns from practices of examination as well as physical construction, into a politics of physical as well as moral sanitization of existing urban housing with particular regard to Haga. Within this domain the “home” appears as the site of potential social progress and, hence, the place where material “improvement” becomes the most urgent. “Old” urban vernacular houses appear as definitely “bad,” but similar to the geographies related above, picturesque and pre-industrial houses are accepted in the urban periphery, however with a distinctive nostalgic dismissal. The research, somewhat surprisingly, reveals a historicization of contemporary Haga within this geography, a historicization which nevertheless resolutely puts Haga’s entire origin (physical heterogeneous appearance and mixed use) in the historical context of 19th century despised housing speculation. Hence, on an over-arching level of analysis of the historicizations, there are striking similarities between this field of regulation and the ones related above. At every instance, Haga appears as the most unwanted place in Göteborg, a marginalisation which eventually puts Haga in the position of the socio-material abject of Göteborg. When, in the mid 20th century, the power over spatial regulation was successively shifted to local authorities, Haga could be turned into the primary object of a local renewal and clearance project of Göteborg (running from 1962). Contradictions

(embryos of re-evaluation) are identified at three instances in the geography of sanitization: one which appears as a hesitation regarding the large-scale modernist plans of 1947; one which appears as the identification of Haga's inhabitants' legitimate approval of Haga; one which appears as a consideration of qualities of the contemporary existing Haga with potential for development.

Chapter five, the last of the empirical chapters, examines the appearance of "old and good Haga" and the corresponding geography of maintenance. In this chapter "old and good Haga" makes up the object of an entire discursive formation (in the sense outlined above). The domain, a domain of academic interest in urban issues, is delineated by the successive appearance of new objects of knowledge ("working-class housing," "19th century urbanity," "wooden construction" and "urban culture") in several disciplines and academic contexts and which together end up putting "Haga" at the very point of an intersection, an observation supported by the fact that several research projects on Haga emerged in the early 1970s. The chapter gives a short overview of a decade of controversies (early 1970s to early 1980s) concerning clearance versus maintenance of Haga; controversies which eventually put Haga in the new position of "old and good Haga," but which was a compromise for each wing. An early split in the "maintenance" wing is discerned as a crucial instance for re-evaluation. The main part of the chapter is left to the geography of maintenance. Setting out to save all of Haga, labelled, first and foremost, as "the oldest working-class district of Göteborg," the discursive rules however only qualified some of Haga's materiality to be historicized. Apart from the objects already included in the museum's 1967 selection (charity funded dwelling houses of the foundation, Dicksonska stiftelsen; Västra Skansgatan, a street with many "typical" wooden houses [landshövdingehus] set the entire street pattern of the area), the maintenance geography was made up by an imagery of "the inmost," "the wooden construction," "the housing-function," "the turn of the century." This, in turn, marginalised Haga's physical and social heterogeneity in particular ways. On an overarching level this brought about a simple conversion of Haga's moral landscape from "outer-nice-new" to "inner-nice-old." This was at the expense of the previously emphasised outer edge, now the previously despised wooden inner poor part of Haga was brought to the fore. However, an even more crucial reshuffling of the moral landscape developed on the level of inter-related but unintended priorities that departed from the labelling of Haga as "the oldest working-class district of Göteborg." This order of priority successively reduced Haga's heterogeneity in building material. Examples of this are stone-houses in the middle of wooden construction, mixed building heights such as high-rise in the middle of low-rise, mixed use buildings such as work-shops located in residential areas, mixed aesthetic appearance such as modernism/functionalism in the mid 19th century urban vernacular, mixed building ages such as buildings less than 40 years old in the middle of buildings dating from the late 19th century, mixed social structure such as bourgeoisie, craftsmen, shop-owners or service sector employees in the midst of workers. These are found to be the main shadows in the geography of maintenance. Herein is revealed the inevitable relationship of imageries and the production of material space. Two contradictions are identified, contradictions which besides serving as intrinsic contradictions of a discursive formation and as instances for further re-shuffling, point beyond the discursive formation in question. One contradiction lies in the recognition of the experience of dwelling in Haga and emphasises the use-values of Haga's buildings. One contradiction maintains that Haga owns qualities that can never be destroyed.

Chapter six discusses some of the main results of the thesis and outlines some possibilities for further research. The fact of a continual historicization of old buildings and Haga, traced as existent over the past 150 years, however with shifting referents, is discussed as a contribution to the conceptualisation of the role of the past in the era of modernity. The re-evaluation of Haga and establishment of "the old and nice Haga" in the 1970s is discussed

as a new discursive formation, but it is the tracing of its genealogy, i.e., the fields of regularity within which the instances of ambivalence appear, that contributes to an understanding of the mechanisms of re-evaluation. An important finding is the existence of continual contradictions over time and in different contexts, and that the disciplinary production of knowledge in separated but parallel contexts supported the shift from a “pre-industrial and rural” to an “industrial and urban” object of knowledge. The discussion also concerns the fact that the contradictions were generally found to exceed the discursive rational normativity, and instead departed from conditions of affect and emotion. Beyond the discursive, other and affective aspects of the past in the present, were traced. It seems as if hereby the limits of the theoretical framework of discourse analysis are touched upon, and this may thus be one important issue for future research. Finally, the content of historicization of Haga turned out to shift dramatically over time. This confirms the hypothesis of the thesis that historicizations, as such, are continually subjectively constructed, whereby they overarch the post-modern era. There is no such thing as one single history of Haga, and Haga is not even one single place. Haga is many places, with or without overlap, with or without relations to each other, with or without unambiguous limits. Re-evaluation is continuously in progress. This thesis reveals how historicizations take part in the sorting of places and people over time and space. The scrutinization of historicizations’ discursive and material effects has hence only begun.