

Issue 35 is a joint piece of research on the topic of compromise. Issue 35 is interested in COMPROMISE as a collective of moments of common exchange between recognised parties, of compliance, conformity or consent; In the collection of unpredictable effects they produce as they escape individual content and evolve through different compositions of give and take; in the way they question principles of cohabitation and play with formulated consistencies; in the pressures, arguments, confrontations, conflicts, hypocrisy and possibly certain violence that they contain; in what is at stake and what is given up and lost in the process of configuration; in their moments of fragility and aspirations to stability; in the instant that they deviate from the initial terms of the concord, subject to the implications of chance and to the transitional realities that surround them; in the many different ways through which our disciplines, especially architecture, can contextualise compromise, consider its active and adaptive power and understand both its constructive and destructive agencies.

Compromise

Rural Compromise

WHEN I WRITE 'PARADISE' I MEAN NOT ONLY APPLE TREES AND GOLDEN WOMEN
BUT ALSO SCORPIONS, TARANTULUS AND FLIES, RATTLESNAKES AND GILA MONSTERS, SANDSTORMS,
VOLCANOES AND EARTHQUAKES, BACTERIA AND BEAR, CACTUS, YUCCA, BLADDERWEED, OCOTILLO,
MESQUITE, FLASH FLOODS AND QUICKSAND, AND YES - DISEASE AND DEATH AND THE ROTTING OF FLESH.

EDWARD ABBEY, DESERT SOLITAIRE: A SEASON IN THE WILDERNESS (1968)

PROLOGUE

Two large paintings hang centrally in the Danish parliament that depict a pastoral landscape not far from an art museum called Fuglsang Kunstmuseum. These commissioned works, painted by the Danish artist Olaf Rude in 1949, are the result of a rural compromise. Initially Rude had only painted red cattle grazing in the landscape, but farmers from Jutland protested. For them, the representation of a typical Zealandish breed of red cattle was unsatisfactory.

As a compromise, Rude changed the color of the cattle – the paintings depicted both the black and white breeds from Jutland as well as the red cattle of Zealand.

INTRODUCTION ⁻¹

There is a high-tech pig farm financed by investors and questionable Bank loans producing 120,000 pigs per year for the global food market. There is a crematorium in the hinterlands of a provincial city processing 8,000 human bodies per year, turning the released energy into heating for the local state school. There is a remote art museum with a countryside view, which is recapturing the pastoral narrative of rural Denmark for some 20,000 visitors per year.

From high-tech agriculture and logistical interface⁻² to nature as a pastoral narrative, the rural is a hybrid

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space shaped by conflicting ideologies and narratives. Bodies, human and non-human, traverse these shifting geographies and mental territories, as the examples of the pig farm, the museum and the crematorium will show. In this text we wish to investigate how the Danish rural is being reconfigured into one homogenous, monocultural space – a production surface in the agriculture state – absorbing the radical rifts that are visible in this territory on both mental and physical grounds. We ask whether the Danish rural is spatially compromised, caught in-between narratives mobilized for contrasting political and aesthetic ends, and bound to an acceptance of standards that are ecologically, socially and economically lower than desired for the sake of the spatial continuum.

Characterized by an ancient process of transforming the land into a continuous exterior of planned and measurable equality, the Danish rural is a space facilitating the smooth movement of machines, goods and bodies and it has proven both manipulative and yielding thanks to its geographical and geological composition. 'Denmark is and stays an agriculture state,' stated vice chairman of the Danish Agriculture and Food Council Lars Hvidtfeldt in 2017.⁻³ Indeed, 62 percent of the Danish geography is farmland. But the sector, which stands for a steeply declining 8.2 percentage of the GDP was recently estimated to be indebted by 4.5 times more than the value of the entire sector (the highest debt of any agricultural industry in the EU).⁻⁴ Moreover, Denmark holds some of the world's poorest nature in terms of biodiversity, and social erosion is widespread in most rural parts of the country.

The crisis of the Danish rural is, as elsewhere, a well-established and widely addressed phenomenon in political debate – the dominant themes being an increasing demographical imbalance connected with urbanization, ecological crisis and economic instability in both agricultural and rural real estate. There is, however – particularly in Denmark's urban population – a widespread tendency towards a rural nostalgia; a longing for time and space long passed, unaltered by modernity and the misdeeds of progress, which have now been rendered suspect in the light of the Anthropocene. Ecologist's movement narratives and imagery of a pre-industrialised rural produced by urban advertising companies resonate beautifully with childhood memories of summer holidays spent with grandparents who were, by all statistical probability, farmers. To a certain degree, the idea of the Danish rural takes form of a lost paradise to the city dweller, they might even feel intimately connected to it through family history, *Et in Arcadia ego*. More often than not, the adventurous few who defy the demographical tendency and move to the countryside are overwhelmed by the discrepancy between the pastoral ideal and its rural reality. Deeply rooted in a Protestant ethic, the contemporary Danish rural oscillates between paradise and perpetual sin with the industrialized farmer as its all-too-familiar protagonist. Criticised for his relentless farming, yet hailed as a symbolic figure in the formation of the Danish state, the farmer resembles a repentant sinner in want of his final salvation.

Thus, the Danish agricultural sector understands itself as a success story. Going back to the Protestant reformation, where the Danish peasants rebelled against the ruling class of clerics and aristocrats, the peasantry has consistently played a central role in forming a decentralized, eventually democratized state based on liberalism, self-governance, and education for all. Throughout the 20th century, agriculture has also been a main contributor to the rise of the Danish welfare state. Its economic growth is related to the rationalization and optimization of the land, recalibrated as a blueprint for the organization of the welfare state.⁻⁵ Cherishing liberal ideologies, the Danish farmer stands for a professional pride in relation to the paroles of industrialization and modernity; to grow, to maximise yield, to apply and refine technology and to instrumentalize reason in favour of production. Not all imperatives of modernity are welcomed, though, as Danish agricultural organizations often point to legislation, control

and documentation as an explanation of a heavily declining sector. Supported by a neo-liberal government in the early 2000s, entrepreneurial farmers were given a window of opportunity and started to engage increasingly in financial speculation, meeting their stressed budgets with investments in Swiss Francs, arable land in Romania, sophisticated speculation in EU agriculture subsidies, et cetera. The capitalization of Danish agriculture became apparent by the 2008 financial crisis, where land prices dropped more steeply than real-estate prices in Copenhagen.⁻⁶

Widely ignored in the pastoral critique of the highly modernized and efficient (but also indebted, ecologically irresponsible and antisocial) agricultural sector is the fact that by now the entanglement between agriculture, financial capital and the Danish banking sector makes Danish agriculture 'too big to fail.' By design or by default, Denmark is indeed an agriculture state and the scientific, industrial and financial 'revolution' in Danish agriculture eventually turned the farmer into an alchemist, coalescing biology, chemistry, capital and geography into one seemingly homogenous space. At last, paradise could be represented as a single, spatially ordered landscape for humans to use for their own purposes.

The land supported the practice of the farmer, while the welfare state – with its concern for taxation of land and the definition of its own domain of social control – relished the capacity to define and produce a space with fixed spatial co-ordinates. The compact geography that constitutes Denmark (42,000 square kilometres) has been poetically summed up in the metaphor of a single and delightful 'garden.'⁻⁷ This pastoral interpretation of Danish geography is not, however, necessarily in opposition to the agriculture state's aspiring towards a rationalized and yielding land. As Leo Marx has pointed out, such a vision of a pastoral utopia and an anxious awareness of an industrialized reality are closely related: 'They illuminate each other.'⁻⁸

The 'machines in the garden' of Denmark, to use Leo Marx's vocabulary – i.e. the pig farm, the art museum and the crematorium – might be seen as interruptions of this pastoral scenery, but in a quirky way they function as vehicles of the production of the Danish rural.



In April 2017 FM Pork ApS inaugurated the first of four pig farms, an ensemble which is going to facilitate the biggest pig meet production in North Europe and produce 120,000 pigs per year that, bred in Denmark, will be processed in Poland. Supported by EU District Development Funds, private investors – and state subsidies – the pig farm is introducing new approaches to environmentally responsible farming: though not certificated as organic farming, the manager bluntly claimed it to stand as 'the most environmentally-friendly produced pig meat in the World.'⁹

With a reduction of antibiotics as well as a circular manure management, the local head of The Danish Nature Preservation Society, Palle Ystrøm, has welcomed the project. He was on the advisory board of the project. 'There are a lot of positive things to say about their farming practice' (Ibid), says Ystrøm about FM Pork ApS to a local newspaper.¹⁰ The newly opened pig farm unit near Haslev, Zealand, has taken over the name Sofiendal (Sophie's Dale) from an old farm, which now lies in juxtaposition with the brand-new buildings.

FM Pork ApS Sofiendal consists of three interconnected rectangular stables. With pitched roofs as well as pitched roofed porches where trucks and workers enter the buildings, the architecture denotes a low-brow postmodern aesthetic. Around the corner, the 19th century buildings of the old Sofiendal are visible. Sofiendal shares faith with many older farm houses made vacant in the process of upscaling farming areas. These houses are literally rendered worthless, paradoxically, in the light of the capital flowing into this locality. There is an awkwardness in relation to the way in which new and old buildings in the rural co-exist: there seems to be a gulf of more than time between them – the precision, the efficiency, the ambition that characterize the new buildings through invested capital is unable to resonate with the somewhat immeasurable vulnerability of the old.

At 3:15pm on the January the 25th, 2008, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark arrived at the endless sugarbeet fields on the flat islands of Lolland-Falster for the inauguration of the newly finished art museum, Fuglsang Kunstmuseum. Financed through EU District Development Funds, private investors and state subsidies, Fuglsang Kunstmuseum both financially and spatially resembles the Sofiendal pig farm. A streamlined, white, modernist building, Fuglsang Kunstmuseum playfully engages architecture as an alien citation amid the surrounding rural landscape of sugarbeet fields. Visitors, who may come here to enjoy the countryside view from the exhibition rooms, find themselves surprisingly in the centre perspective of a Euclidean geometrical space consisting of modern architecture and symmetrical lines of sugar beets bent towards the distant horizon.

The museum's collection of 19th and early 20th century art works depict a rural reality on the brink of industrialization and the increasing control of space. The conquest of real geographies, as occurred just outside Fuglsang Kunstmuseum up until the 1970s – hectare-by-hectare of land reclamation from fjords, moors and sea – was preceded by a change in the mental territory, and the perception of space as something increasingly malleable, effectively renderable, and therefore capable of domination through human action and capital.

The early industrialization of Danish agriculture meant the abstraction of geographies into one geometric and homogenous land. It made time and space shrink, literally the relation between the investments and the energy necessary to work the land, and the amount of land which could be worked within a certain timeframe. The remnants of this progress is now preserved in museums, like Fuglsang Kunstmuseum, as nostalgic artefacts. Their presence do not fit into the production environment of the agriculture state but necessarily feed into the link between pastoral representation and national identity. Contemplating the shifting perspective from the art works adorning the museum's walls to the views overlooking the sugar beet fields, it seems that, in the regime of progress, the present and the future both hold a privileged position over history and the past. Like a Hegelian 'synthesis' of all times into the present – which is the most progressed state – older times and orders are reduced to fragments of accumulated historical debris from earlier stages.

It could be argued, that the desecralisation of Danish nature extends to the human body itself. Opened in 2014 in the hinterlands of the provincial city Ringsted, the largest crematorium in Denmark processes 8,000 bodies per year. The energy released in the cremation process is turned into district heating for the local state school. Logistically managing death in an area covering Zealand and Lolland-Falster, the crematorium was realized as a joint venture between the Danish protestant state church (Lutheran-Evangelical) and the welfare state system under the argument of a more efficient and above all environmentally-friendly cremation process.¹¹

The crematorium, which is situated in a carefully crafted rural landscape with valleys and patches of plantation, receives bodies from within a radius of 150 kilometres. Bodies are transported to the crematorium (four in each transporter) and each coffin has a discrete bar code (which is related to the CPR number or Central Person Register number),¹² by which the transportation workers can independently check in the coffin to the crematorium 24 hours a day. Through a special app, workers in the crematorium itself can trace the coffin through the whole process of cremation. The surplus of hot water, which is produced in the process of cooling down the smoke from the cremation, is distributed to the local state school as district heating.

Strictly speaking, it is not the heat from the cremation itself which reaches the school in the end. However, the local population welcome the symbolic effect of using surplus heat from the crematorium. The caretaker of the school in question says: 'You know, the children at the school, they think it's beautiful that they get the last warmth of their uncle or aunt, or whomever is being cremated over there at the crematorium.' The Danish Council on Ethics¹³ (a non-governmental board which advises the state in ethical questions) stated its stance on the controversial connection between crematorium and district heating, declaring that they 'don't find it indecent to reuse the heat from the cremation process for district heating.' On the contrary, there are 'good reasons, especially environmental reasons' for this optimization of the cremation process.¹⁴



The concept of 'compromise' has conflicting definitions and resonates differently according to the situation. A compromise can mean to give up, but it can also mean to consider the needs and interests of the other. Either way, within the logic of a compromise, a reality (and not an ideal) is produced. The Danish agriculture state produces a rural compromise which absorbs the spatial contrasts of pastoral imagination, industrial ambition, capitalistic aspirations and (de) sacralised logistics of the welfare state and merges them into one homogenous space. Thus, the different narratives of the Danish rural could be seen as an array of aesthetic apparatuses which are contesting the establishment of different realities but end up feeding into the same, spatially flattened compromise of one homogenous continuum. The three examples of the pig farm, the art museum and the crematorium seem to us to be examples of a reduction of complex spheres into manageable 'machineries': pigs as industrial products, set apart from the natural world and the time and space outside of the stable units; the physical landscape of land

and capital collapsed into its abstraction, so that the previous realities of the rural are reduced to handy museum artefacts of little but anecdotal relevance to the present; the phenomenon of life and death being translated into questions of technical transformations.

On a field trip to the Danish rural, we are simultaneously fascinated by and anxious of the various transformations that we were witness to. We traverse shifting geographies and mental territories that are increasingly abstract in the landscape of the agriculture state. A question emerges: how we can negotiate the rural compromise anew without addressing it from within this homogenous continuum?

A more promising compromise in the Danish rural would be that of several possible orders of meaning a reality of co-existing, in which the visible layers of near and distant pasts would be granted significance to our everyday life, in which nature could be perceived as something not rationalised, in which the bonds that link humans to the environment could be perceived as a deeper reality.



EPILOGUE

Central in the Danish parliament hang two large paintings of Olaf Rude. The paintings hang as an ironic reminder to the Danish agriculture state and suggest that its status as a compromise should ideally be witnessed as a traceable complexity and not as one homogenous, monocultural space.

1 The Danish language only recently adopted the term 'rural' as a description of something related to the countryside and agriculture. The common Danish term for countryside is 'landet', equivalent to the English term 'land' and meaning both [1] geography and [2] territory. The term nature (Naturen, in Danish) is essentially related to the concept of 'landet' both as a geography and a specific territory: meanwhile, Naturen is both the ecosystem and a specific site of the land. As a specific site, 'naturen' is equivalent to the English term countryside. The English idiom 'going to the countryside' translates in Danish to 'gå ud i naturen'

'going out into the nature.' Since both nature and countryside resonate differently than 'nature' and 'landet' we choose here to use the more natural term rural.
2 Bratton, Benjamin (architect.com/features/article/150052196/new-ground-ii countryside-2030)
3 www.lf.dk/kontakt/presseforum kommentarer/2017/danmark-er-og-bliver-et-landbrugsland
4 www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/faktatjek-baeredygtigt-landbrug-overdriver-landbrugets-betydning, www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyt/ytHtml?cid=19738

5 Nielsen, Jørgen Steen, Hvad skal vi med landbruget? (2016)
6 www.nationalbanken.dk/da/publikationer/Documents/2011/03/udviklingen%20p%C3%A5%20ejerboligmarkedet.pdf
7 L.R. Jensen Jeg ved hvor der ndes en have så skon (1890), Højskolesangbogen (2006), p. 361
8 Marx, Leo, The Machine in the Garden (1964), p. 30
9 www.veast.dk/artikel/gods-vil-lave-kaempe-produktion-af-svin-med-kun-lidt-medicin
10 Ibid.
11 www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland

overskudsvarme-fra-ligbraending-varmer-skole-op
12 The CPR-number, which is mandatory for every Danish citizen, is used in all relations between the state and the individual, from tax to health care and library loans, etc.
13 Interview with caretaker at Benløse School Søren Niland. Interview and translation by the authors.
14 www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/overskudsvarme-fra-ligbraending-varmer-skole-ops

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